Northern Ireland Assembly

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(Hansard)

and

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Official Report
(Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 11 February 2013

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Constable Philippa Reynolds

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Gregory Campbell has been given leave to make a statement on the death of police officer Philippa Reynolds in Londonderry, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should indicate that by rising in their places and continuing to do so. All Members who are called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

I remind Members that, as the investigation is ongoing, they should be careful not to say anything that might impact on any cases that may come before the courts.

Mr Campbell: Like many people in Northern Ireland, I awoke on Saturday morning to the terrible news of the death of Constable Philippa Reynolds. None will have been more affected by that news than the family and close friends of that young woman. As you said, Deputy Speaker, I do not wish to allude in any way to the circumstances that are before the courts. I merely want to ensure that the entire community, as represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly, shares in the grief of the family and friends of that young woman.

As has been outlined in far better terms than I can, her commanding officer, Chief Superintendent Stephen Cargin, indicated the sense of loss the police family has felt and continues to feel. He said that she loved to do her job and that she was:

"serving the community to the best of her ability".

He also said that she was:

"enthusiastic, bubbly and had a beautiful personality."

Unfortunately, only two years into the job as a serving police officer, her life ended in the early hours of Saturday morning. Previous to that, she had been a teacher, and had exhibited all the characteristics that I just mentioned. As a society, we are, sadly, the losers, as a young woman has passed on as the result of this accident.

I think that today we need to stand united with the police family and with the wider community, which the police serve and have served over the past 40 years, and assure them of our thoughts and prayers at this very difficult time.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): As Mr Campbell said, the House will be well aware that, at around 3.40 am on Saturday, as a result of a road traffic collision, police Constable Philippa Reynolds was killed. She was a rear seat passenger in a police vehicle on duty in the Ebrington area of Derry city and was killed in a collision with a stolen vehicle. Two of her colleagues were injured, though, fortunately, not seriously. We send our sympathy to them today as well.

I know, as Mr Campbell has said, that all Members of the House — indeed, of this entire community — will be united in paying tribute to the work of Constable Reynolds and in expressing sympathy to her parents, Mervyn and Dorothy, her sisters, her family circle and all her PSNI colleagues. As you have said, since two men have been charged in connection with the incident, it would not be appropriate to say anything more on that. However, it is absolutely clear that Philippa Reynolds died doing the job that she was enthusiastic about and to which she was dedicated — working on behalf of everyone in this community.

Over the weekend, I spoke to the Chief Constable, the Deputy Chief Constable and other officers in Belfast and Strand Road. It was absolutely clear that this tragic death has affected the PSNI deeply. Yet, in the conversation that I had early on Saturday morning with an officer in Strand Road, it was clear that there was also the resilience and the determination to do the job in general and to ensure that those who perpetrated the act were caught. There is a resilience and a strong determination among officers in the PSNI to continue to do their duty and to make Northern Ireland safer for us all.

As has been said, Philippa passed out as a constable only in early 2011. She had barely two years' service, yet it was clear that she was already a dedicated officer and an extremely valued colleague. She qualified and worked as a teacher but gave up that profession to serve the community as a police officer, and she spent her entire career based in Strand Road. Although she was a dedicated police officer, let us remember that she was also rather more than that. She was a keen hockey player with the Owls club and was connected with the Girls' Brigade.

Mr Campbell referred to the quote on Saturday from the district commander, Chief Superintendent Stephen Cargin, but it bears repetition: she had just a "really bubbly personality". That has been echoed by others, including those who knew her well and, indeed, by the picture that her family released over the weekend. Many a girl with the heel of her shoe caught in a grating would have been sitting sobbing; she was just laughing, because that was the pleasant personality that she had.

On Saturday, the Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Alan Shatter, asked me to pass on their condolences, which I was able to do.

It is clear that her tragic death has affected not just her friends and colleagues but many throughout these islands, particularly in south Antrim. On behalf of my colleagues and the entire justice family, I assure her family that they are in our thoughts and prayers at this time.

Mr Clarke: I join my colleagues in expressing sympathy to Philippa's family and the wider family circle on her tragic death at the weekend. Although I did not know Philippa Reynolds personally, I appreciate that she was from south Antrim and, at the end of the day, she was a young lady cut down in the prime of her life while doing her chosen job. She was someone who had changed her career path from education and chosen the Police Service. Her loss is tragic to her family and, at this time, our thoughts and prayers should be with them.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I offer our sincere condolences to the family and many friends of Philippa Reynolds, the young PSNI constable who was tragically killed on Saturday morning. This tragic accident highlights the dangers that police officers operate under daily. However, as has been said, an investigation is under way and court proceedings have begun, so I will be careful not to comment further or impinge on that process.

On Saturday afternoon, the Mayor of Derry, Kevin Campbell, and some of his Sinn Féin councillor colleagues called at PSNI headquarters in Derry to express condolences to the PSNI and to Constable Reynolds's family and friends. He also wished her injured colleagues a swift and speedy recovery, as all in the House will support.

I never met Philippa Reynolds, but I was talking to Kevin yesterday, who told me that her death has had a profound effect at a local level on her PSNI colleagues, those who worked with her on a day and daily basis. They recognised and appreciated the genuine grief and sadness in Derry over her death in such circumstances.

As I hear and read accolades from her PSNI colleagues, her former teaching associates and her hockey teammates, it is clear that Philippa Reynolds was a remarkable young woman. The PSNI and we as a community have lost a bright young talent who would have made a distinctive contribution to our community.

I offer sincere condolences to her family. When young people die in such tragic circumstances, it has an effect beyond the family, but we can only imagine the tremendous impact, and our thoughts are with them today. Déanaim comhbhrón leis an teaghlach, agus go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a hanam uasal.

Mr Hussey: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I express our sincere sympathy to Philippa's mother, father, sisters and boyfriend on this tragic loss. We also express our sympathies to the Police Service in general, and we also think of the two officers who were injured at the same time.

As you know, I had the honour to serve in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and I know of the camaraderie when officers are on duty. I know the fun that people can have in a job like policing. I know the characters whom they meet during their life as police officers. The friends whom you make while you are on patrol will be with you for the rest of your days. I know what it is like to be in a police car that is hit by another car, because I was in a police car that was rammed on one occasion, and I am paying for it yet. For a young woman of 27 years of age to lose her life in such tragic circumstances is something that we cannot comprehend, but our thoughts and prayers must be with her family because they are the people who have had the biggest loss. Society has lost a police officer who by all accounts would have gone far in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Our thoughts must be with the PSNI in Londonderry, because this will be with them for many days to come.

Mr Durkan: It is with great sadness that I rise to express the shock and sorrow of my city and this region at the death while on duty of a police officer in the early hours of Saturday. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family, friends and colleagues of Philippa Reynolds at this very difficult time. Clearly, she was a young lady who was highly regarded, respected and loved by all who knew her and whose life was dedicated to public service. This incident highlights the risks and dangers faced by the police and, indeed, by all our emergency services on a daily and nightly basis, and why we must give them all the support they need to serve and protect our community.

Mr Craig: In the early hours of Saturday morning, the news was passed on to me, as it was to many others, about the death of Constable Philippa Reynolds. It came as a deep shock not only to her family but to the wider policing family. I spoke to a few officers after that, and there was a sense of deep loss about this young individual who had joined the force less than two years earlier. It is a very good testimony to Philippa that her fellow officers felt the loss so deeply and that in her two years in the service, she was so highly thought of by the force. Society as a whole is the big loser from the loss of Philippa Reynolds.

12.15 pm

She was an individual who took part in almost everything in her local community. Mention was made of her participation in hockey, the GB and other societies. She entered into everything that she did as an individual with all her heart, and the same was true of her commitment to the PSNI. It is a very sad loss indeed.

Although our hands are tied in speaking about how her loss has come about, it is deeply regrettable that such an event has occurred. It is not the first time that such an event has occurred, and, unfortunately, it will not be the last.

I send my sympathy and that of our party, and, indeed, the prayers of my family and many others, to the Reynolds family at this time.

Mr McDevitt: I rise as a member of the Policing Board and chairman of its human rights and professional standards committee. It is very sad that we have to stand here to note, regret and condemn the violation of a police officer's most fundamental human right, which is the right to life.

I join with colleagues in expressing our heartfelt sympathies to her parents, her sisters, her boyfriend and her colleagues. She seemed to embody everything that you would want in a modern police officer in Northern Ireland — someone who was rooted in her community, who was dedicated to volunteering and volunteerism

and who had life experience beyond policing, which she seemed very determined to bring to her job as a constable.

It is worth noting that the families of Garda Gary McLoughlin and Garda Robbie McCallion, who were killed in the north-west in similar circumstances in recent years, will know better than any family the pain, anguish and sense of not understanding that will be going through the Reynolds family today.

I look forward to the speedy progress of justice, and I stand in solidarity with the rest of the House in expressing our heartfelt sympathies, our best wishes and our love to her family and friends.

Mr Allister: I wish to associate myself with the tributes and condolences that have been expressed to the Reynolds family.

When someone dies in a road traffic accident, it always brings great shock and a great sense of tragedy, but when that person is someone as young and as vibrant as Philippa Reynolds, it is even more poignant. For many, when we think of her age and of our own children who are at or about the same age, the poignancy of it comes home to us.

I know that these are dark days for the Reynolds family and that there will be dark days ahead. However, I trust that the sense of community empathy will be some small comfort to them, as will the acknowledgement of the contribution that their daughter was making to society.

In mourning this loss, it would be remiss of the House if we did not also remember that another family is suffering bereavement at this time because of a road traffic accident. I refer to the loss just a few hours previously of the life of John Hillis in an accident that occurred between Tandragee and Poyntzpass. He was known to some of us in the House because of his previous service as a councillor in the community. I would like to join, as I am sure would others, in conveying condolences to the Hillis family and to his wife and son and daughters on his sad passing.

Philippa Reynolds was taking part in a routine patrol to keep the community safe. I want to finish by saying that we are also grateful to another police patrol at the weekend, which, through its alertness and quick action, ensured that we were not meeting here today to note a tragic outcome to the arson and terrorist attack on the home of William Frazer. We are grateful to the police for the swift action that they took.

Assembly Business

Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion, and, therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning and as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Mr Weir.]

Ministerial Statement

Apprenticeships and Youth Training

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement about my intention to undertake a major review of my Department's policy on apprenticeships and youth training. Such opportunities are important for our economy in matching skills to the needs of employers, and for our young people in providing opportunities and giving them a stake in society, while investing in their own skill levels.

I strongly endorse the concept of apprenticeships. They constitute a form of training that is warmly embraced by the business community. In essence, an apprentice is someone who is trained while being employed. I believe that, in our evolving economy, there are now new types of employment and levels of training for which the apprenticeship concept would be of value. At the same time, not every training opportunity or area of employment requires the rigour of a formal apprenticeship. So, in turn, we also have a duty to support and facilitate other forms of training for young people.

As our economy is going through a considerable transformation in both the types of goods and services that are produced or provided by business and the nature of employment and job opportunities, I have decided to launch a major review of apprenticeships and youth training. I want to ensure that they support the growth and rebalancing of the local economy and meet the specific needs of business for a highly skilled workforce. I also want to ensure that young people are provided with opportunities to develop the skills and experience required to be attractive to employers and to provide consistently high-quality training leading to qualifications that can support them throughout their working lives.

My aim is to build on and enhance existing strong provision, ensuring that Northern Ireland has a system of apprenticeship and youth training that is the gold standard — a system that makes our European partners look to us for good practice. Skills are the main driver of the transformation of the Northern Ireland economy. We have a clear requirement to increase skill levels across a broad front. My Department's skills strategy sets out what is required in attainment at levels 2, 3, 4 and above if Northern Ireland is to be internationally competitive by 2020. We also need a stronger focus on STEM skills, namely science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The jobs of tomorrow will require higher-level skills across a wide range of occupations. We need to address skills shortages and skills mismatches wherever they occur. In turn, we must match skills to the specific needs of employers. Our excellent local universities already provide strong, clear pathways to higher-level skills. Northern Ireland has a strong footprint in higher education, including the highest participation rates in the UK. That is now supported by Northern Ireland's first higher education strategy, with a strong emphasis on the local economy and a significant increase in both undergraduate and postgraduate places.

We also have a strong and flexible further education sector, with six excellent colleges providing skills and qualifications at a range of levels. Indeed, alongside other skills providers, they support on-the-job training. However, we also need to ensure that we are offering plausible alternative non-academic pathways to address our skills requirements, including higher level qualifications — pathways that are just as rigorous and just as valid.

In conducting the review of apprenticeships and youth training, we will be investing in a full spectrum of interventions to support our skills agenda.

The concept of an apprentice is not a new one. It goes back to the Middle Ages, when young people sought to be an apprentice under a master. In return for their labour, they were provided with a job, instruction and lodgings. Apprenticeships have been fundamental to the industrial heritage of Northern Ireland and, in the 19th and 20th centuries, helped the region prosper and gain a worldwide reputation for quality and innovation in manufacturing, some of which we retain today. At that time, the apprenticeship route into a career was much sought after by young people and was highly valued by the businesses that employed them and by wider society. Some of the top leaders in industry, academia and the public sector today started their career as apprentices.

Much has changed in the nature of business and the nature of employment since the origins of apprenticeships. Today we are a predominantly service- and knowledge-based economy, with growth in business services such as ICT and finance, in tourism, in advanced engineering, and in food and drink manufacturing. I want the review to ensure that apprenticeship training is more closely matched to the economy's growth sectors and to the needs of businesses in those sectors.

We have only to look at the Titanic Quarter to see how dramatic the changes have been. Harland and Wolff, once the largest shipbuilder in the world, has transformed itself into a manufacturer for the renewable energy sector. The Titanic building welcomes tourists from all over the world to the very slipways where the White Star Line vessels were built. The Northern Ireland Science Park, which houses multiple start-up companies that are making commercial use of research and development work from the universities, sits beside the last remaining naval ship from the battle of Jutland. The multinational Citigroup employs over 1,200 people, who have undertaken jobs that were once located in New York or London, on what was once a brownfield industrial development site. In amongst those organisations is the new campus of Belfast Metropolitan College.

Into the 21st century, we have rightly retained the concept of young people taking up a job and accepting a wage in return for the opportunity to learn the skills from their employer, and, nowadays, from training experts in colleges or with other training providers, to become proficient in the job and to enter sustainable employment. Over the past decade, government and business have invested heavily in apprenticeships and other training for thousands of young people.

ApprenticeshipsNI is currently the main apprenticeship programme. It offers training across a wide range of occupational areas to employees. Those employees earn a wage while working with experienced staff to learn and

develop their skills. An apprentice also receives off-the-job training to work towards achieving a competence-based qualification, a knowledge-based qualification and essential skills. Records show that 10,900 apprentices are in training. Our current programme applies only to levels 2 and 3.

Recently, on the back of the ICT action plan, which was published in June 2012, my Department worked with IT Assist, which is the provider of IT services to the Northern Ireland Civil Service, and local ICT employers to develop a public-private ICT apprenticeship pilot. That aims to address the skills shortages being experienced by the local ICT sector and encourages the sector to explore new recruitment models to employ individuals rather than rely on the traditional method of recruiting graduates from university.

The employer engagement plan, which I published last March, outlines a commitment to introduce higher-level apprenticeship pilots in the ICT and engineering sectors. Higher-level apprenticeships respond to employers' higher-level skill needs, support business growth, meet the career aspirations of individuals and enhance opportunities for social mobility. The Department has worked with a number of leading companies, training organisations and sector skills councils (SSCs) to put the pilots in place. The ICT pilot was launched in November 2012 at South West College. Discussions are continuing on the establishment of an engineering pilot, and it is hoped that agreement on the terms of the pilot will be reached in the very near future.

Although those measures are welcome additions to the apprenticeship offering, it is clear to me that apprenticeships have lost some of their earlier-held status, and there are several reasons for that. There is still a perception that they were only for manual jobs in the craft, construction and engineering sectors. Often, other pathways of education are held in greater esteem.

A false hierarchy has been created between academic education and vocational or technical training and education. That can lead to some rigidity in the pathways to progression.

12.30 pm

I want the review to examine how the apprenticeship pathway to a career can be seen as equal to, or even better than, the academic route and enjoy high levels of esteem, returning it to the prestige it once enjoyed, valued by employers, society and the apprentice. I want the review to explore whether and how young people can embark on an apprenticeship, but also progress into higher education should they wish to, not just on a full-time basis and not necessarily directly after work.

I want to see how an apprenticeship can be a stepping stone to higher-level skills, not just an end in itself. I want the review to take into account the successes of our education system, whereby more young people are leaving school with better qualifications, and recognise that the jobs of tomorrow will require higher levels of competence than in the past, as identified in the skills strategy. We currently have many apprentices at level 2, but I am convinced that businesses will increasingly require higher-level apprentices progressing to levels 4 and 5 — the equivalent of a foundation degree and a bachelor's degree — or even further.

Apprenticeships are not the only form of vocational training. We must consider traineeships that offer pathways to apprenticeships themselves, and, indeed, other routes that offer progression into education or employment. Not all our young people will be ready to take on an apprenticeship. Some will need a small amount of additional training to prepare for the challenges of future apprenticeships; others will require an extended package of training and work experience.

There are also young people who are much further removed from the labour market, and whose journey towards employment will be much longer. As for other training opportunities for young people, my Department already offers a de facto training guarantee, with a place for all unemployed 16- to 17-year-old school leavers. The guarantee is extended for young people with a disability or from an in-care background, up to the ages of 22 and 24 respectively.

Training for Success is designed to enable participants to progress to higher-level training, further education or employment by providing training to address personal and social development needs, develop occupational and employability skills, and, where necessary, essential skills training. There are three strands of Training for Success: skills for your life; skills for work; and programme-led apprenticeships.

The programme-led apprenticeships strand is an intervention measure introduced in September 2009. It aims to ensure that those who have been assessed as being capable of achieving an apprenticeship qualification at level 2, but who have not yet secured employment, are prepared for future progression to employment as an apprentice. Participants follow the same apprenticeship framework as those following the ApprenticeshipsNI provision, spending time in directed training and work-based learning placements with an industry-appropriate employer. Currently, around 2,300 young people are participating in strands one and two of Training for Success, and 5,100 young people are participating in programme-led apprenticeships.

I want to ensure that flexible and appropriate provision is available for all our young people, regardless of their starting point. The review of youth training will ensure that the new training offer for young people is sufficiently broad and flexible to enable them to progress to an apprenticeship or into employment. The review will explore how we can engage more with employers on the training curriculum and improve young people's employability skills through measures like work placements. I intend that the youth training review will consider the vocational pathways that are available to young people post-16, and how those link with further education provision in our colleges and higher education provision in our universities. It is important that we have in place a holistic approach to training that facilitates transitions between full-time education and training and continued learning within the workplace.

The review will consider the different factors pertaining to apprenticeships and post-school youth training. On apprenticeships, it will consider the role of the employer and training provider in shaping, supporting and managing apprenticeship programmes; the role of government in shaping and supporting apprenticeship programmes; contingency planning around how to make use of any

tax incentives that may become available from the UK Government; which occupational areas would benefit from government-funded apprenticeships, and at what levels, in order to grow and rebalance the economy; whether the current range of subjects or frameworks is sufficient to meet the needs of employers and the economy; the framework for training, including the qualifications to ensure that they are recognised and valued by employers and apprentices; how apprenticeships can provide support for pathways, both academically and vocationally; the components of an apprenticeship programme, including its duration, employment, the contents of the training programme, an examination of appropriate requirements for numeracy, literacy and ICT, and the development of enterprise and employability skills; how to have parity of esteem between apprenticeships and other further and higher education pathways; the role that higher-level apprenticeships should play and how best to develop and facilitate them; how apprenticeships can be expanded into the professions; how SMEs can be encouraged to engage with apprenticeships; how apprenticeships can have a better gender balance and be attractive to all; how the system and processes can be simplified, where possible; and how best practice in other jurisdictions can be incorporated into the framework for apprenticeships in Northern Ireland.

With youth training, the review will consider how to best ensure that, in practice, every young person, post-16, has the opportunity to participate in a training programme; the essential components for one or more effective programmes, which provides a plausible non-academic pathway to prepare young people for progression to an apprenticeship or into sustainable employment; other elements of flexible content that may be required in addition to the core offer of employability and essential skills; how to improve young people's employability skills, including the importance of work experience and how it can be integrated into any offer; how to clarify the offer to enable young people to make the correct choices on entry routes and progression opportunities; the age range and duration of future programmes; how to engage employers in the content of the training programmes and the employers' support in providing work experience opportunities; and the delivery arrangements to enable a flexible and personalised offer appropriate to the young person's needs.

In carrying out the review, I want to ensure that it will complement and link with the Executive's key priorities, the Northern Ireland Executive's economic strategy and the Northern Ireland skills strategy and so help to rebalance and rebuild the economy over the short, medium and longer term. The terms of reference will be published on my Department's website today. The review will be conducted by the Department, and I intend to make it a personal priority over the coming months.

I want the whole review process to be inclusive and to engage with all the relevant stakeholders, be they employers, trade unions, training suppliers, further education colleges and, indeed, young people themselves. I want it to be a thorough review of our policies, but I do not want it to be an exhausting academic exercise. It needs to be evidence-based and pragmatic but also visionary and imaginative. We will also want to learn from the best experiences from the rest of the UK, the rest of Europe and beyond.

I plan to announce the membership of an expert advisory group that will provide advice to the review within the next few weeks. There will also shortly be a call for submissions. I will host a forum for all stakeholders to attend in late spring, at which we will present some of our early thinking and take their views to guide and shape our thinking. I will also keep members of this Assembly and the Committee for Employment and Learning advised of our progress through regular communications.

The review will conclude in the autumn of this year. It is likely that we would then proceed to formal public consultation on the provisional conclusions of the review. Once my officials and I have considered the responses, we will formalise new policy and programmes and seek to implement changes as soon as possible. My ambition is to have a system of apprenticeships and youth training that is regarded as a gold standard across Europe.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for his statement, and I appreciate the briefing that he gave me this morning. Without doubt, this is a timely intervention, and the Committee will welcome the fact that we will look at apprenticeships from a general point of view.

It is quite a substantive document from the Minister, and I will just make a few points. I realise that we are at the initial stages of this activity and, therefore, there is nothing specific to ask questions about. So, I will confine myself to raising a few points that the Minister may wish to expand on.

At the top of page 4, he says:

> *"it is clear to me that apprenticeships have lost some of their earlier status."*

I would welcome the Minister clarifying how he might address that, particularly with reference to the German/ Swiss model.

The issue of programme-led apprenticeships is mentioned on page 5. Those were a useful intervention in September 2009, but there is now perhaps some conflict between those and industry-led apprenticeships. Finally, in ICT, we need to upskill to level 4 and level 5 and above.

In concluding, I draw to the Minister's attention a statement from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) to the Committee to show some of the difficulties that he has. NIE had 4,000 applicants for 50 apprenticeships in two years. Of the 2,000 who applied, 300 did not bother to turn up. Of the 1,700 who sat basic skills tests in literacy, numeracy and mechanics, only 600 came through. Of the 600 who came through and did practical tests, only 200 made it through. Of the 200 who were interviewed, only 45 were taken on. Minister, this shows that the issue of apprenticeships cannot be taken in isolation. We need a total solution. I wish you well in your inquiry, and I am sure that the Committee will wish to participate.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his comments. First, I stress that this is a very substantive piece of work and something that I believe is of fundamental importance to the economy in Northern Ireland. This is very much the opening salvo, and it was appropriate to come to the Assembly and make the statement. I give an undertaking to come back to report on our interim conclusions in due course and, indeed, on the

final conclusions when we reach those. Indeed, we look forward to an ongoing engagement with the Committee.

The Chair mentioned a number of points, and I will try to take each of those in turn. First of all, there is the issue of the status of apprenticeships. We have good programmes at present, and they are making a difference, but it is fair to say that we have a hierarchy in this society that values certain pathways over others. It is important that we recognise that we need to look at all of those pathways and ensure that we have the appropriate balance and treat all as being of equal worth. Obviously, people will have different ambitions and attributes and will lend themselves more readily to different pathways, but we have a duty to ensure that we have the full spectrum in place and, more importantly, that we are directly engaging with employers and ensuring that they are getting precisely what they need with the people coming through.

He mentioned the German and Swiss model, where they clearly do have that parity of esteem, if I can use that term, between the different pathways. We are very keen to learn what we can from that model and to see what lessons can be applied to Northern Ireland. I should caution, of course, that there are much wider cultural factors in a lot of the continental European societies that lend themselves to a different model on the economy. They have, for example, much stronger social partnership relations. Nevertheless, where we can draw lessons, we will endeavour to do so.

He mentioned programme-led apprenticeships. Those were introduced as a direct response to the recession and the difficulties that young people were having in finding opportunities. Again, I stress that we need employers to be partners in all of this, because employers need to create the apprenticeship opportunities in the first place, and government, in turn, will do what it can to support them in that regard. We will be looking at programme-led apprenticeships as part of this review.

He also mentioned the important ICT sector in Northern Ireland and the opportunities there for higher-level apprenticeships. I fully concur with the thrust of the remarks that he has been making. ICT is a growth industry in Northern Ireland and requires people coming through from a range of different pathways, whether that is university or whether it is through the apprenticeship route. Obviously, apprenticeships offer that on-the-job training, which may be suitable for some aspects of the ICT sector, particularly the more technical aspects.

We are developing a pilot for level 4 ICT, and that was launched in November last year at the South West College, but we need to press on and consider whether we can do even more in that regard, and also whether we can broaden out higher-level apprenticeships to other areas, both in the range of subjects and the levels. We should not just stop at level 4 but consider level 5 and potentially level 6.

12.45 pm

The Member made reference to the need for a holistic approach. Clearly, what we are doing with this review is looking at apprenticeships and youth training, but nothing in this society ever happens in isolation. Work on other avenues is under way. That could be through Department of Education around improving attainment levels in schools. There is also work on the entitlement framework, and on the prospect of having a 14-19 strategy in place. We need to ensure that we are encouraging people coming through. I think that, in due course, careers has a role to play in advising young people about the different pathways in place.

Let me stress that I have spoken directly to NIE. I am fully aware of its particular issues, and we are happy to engage with it to see if there is anything we can do to improve the situation that it has experienced.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, though the Chairperson of the Committee enjoys a level of extension to his questions, that does not pertain to other Members. I ask you to be concise in your questions, and I am sure that the Minister will be equally concise in his answers. I see that Mr Buchanan is smiling.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement. As stated on page 1, the Minister's aims and aspirations are:

> *"to build upon and enhance existing strong provision, ensuring that Northern Ireland has a system of apprenticeship and youth training that is the 'gold standard'".*

It was stated that other European countries should be able to look on and get some value from it, which would be valued by employers and will be a stepping stone to higher-level skills. What consideration has or will be given to the German model, which seems to have different pathways and, indeed, it has to be said, is leading the way, so far as youth employment is concerned?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his questions. With regard to aspirations, it is important that we are ambitious for this society. Clearly, in decades past, Northern Ireland was a world leader in the global economy. Through many of our products, we were the world leader. We need to seek to recapture that position but, in doing so, we need to recognise that the nature of the economy is changing, and that the areas in which Northern Ireland is strong today, and will be strong in the future, are evolving. It is important that our apprenticeship frameworks and youth training are flexible and meet the shifting demands of the economy and employers, including through higher-level skills.

The Member's remarks on the German economy reflect the comments that the Chair of the Committee made. We will look very closely at what is happening in Germany. The Member is right to say that there are very clear alternative pathways that have been established over many generations, particularly in the Germanic countries of Europe. We will not be able just to lift that and drop it into our society, given that we have a number of different local features that are not reflected elsewhere in Europe, but which we hold in common with the rest of these islands. However, there will be lessons that we can derive from that, including how we can better link in with industry, build up the esteem of an apprenticeship and communicate to young people that going into an apprenticeship is as worthy as going to college directly for a dedicated course or going to university. In turn, it is for the rest of society to recognise that people make choices that are all of value to the economy and, indeed, that people can rise to be successful.

It is also important that we use mentors and good case studies of people who have risen to dizzy heights. For example, one that is very close to home is the example of Alastair Hamilton, the chief executive of Invest Northern

Ireland, who started out as an apprentice and is now heading our economic development organisation. That just shows that there are different pathways and that people can be successful no matter which way they start off.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. Given that a large number of the engineering manufacturing sector's firms are located in the Tyrone and mid-Ulster area, will the Minister elaborate on the engineering pilot scheme that he referred to in his statement?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. On the general point about engineering skills, we are running an engineering skills working group, which is working closely with the business community to address some of the very particular skill needs that it identified. We hope to launch the engineering apprentice pilot at level 4 in the very near future, and we are in discussions with Semta, which is the sector skills council for that part of the economy. We hope to conclude that soon. We identified that in our employer engagement plan as an area that we want to expand into. Hopefully, that is only the tip of the iceberg for higher level apprenticeships for engineering and other subjects.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. Indeed, I raised the issue of apprenticeships with the Minister and his officials some months ago in reference to local employers in mid-Ulster finding young people with employability skills and the delivery of appropriate engineering apprenticeship schemes. The Minister announced a comprehensive policy review, including an expert advisory group and a forum for all stakeholders. Given that it will be the autumn at the earliest before a consultation is launched, when can we expect new policies on the ground that will benefit our young people?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. Hopefully, she has sparked some thoughts in our minds with the questions that she raised earlier. I want this to be a short, sharp, focused process. However, given the nature of how we develop policy in Northern Ireland, it is important that we take a little time to engage with all the relevant stakeholders to ensure that we get this right. The last thing that we should have is a situation where we are, essentially, writing policy in closed offices without that engagement.

We will be looking to announce the advisory group in the next few weeks and, thereafter, the stakeholder forum, which will be a much larger meeting where we can test out some of the emerging thinking. I will want to bring this phase of the review to a conclusion as quickly as possible. The target date is early autumn this year, which is only seven or eight months away. It is not a long process.

Depending on precisely what the review says, it is likely that we will need to go out to public consultation, given that we will be making recommendations on formal policy. However, at that stage, very clear recommendations will be in place, which we will market-test through that consultation. Once the consultation closes, we will, within a matter of weeks or a couple of months, reach the final conclusions. We will then need to look at precisely what point we are at in the cycle of apprenticeships to determine when we can commence implementation. Depending on the particular aspect, we may be able to implement some aspects straight away, others in September 2014 and others in September 2015.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's very substantive statement. I agree with the Chair: there is so much in it that we can only but welcome it. Does the Minister acknowledge the high levels of youth unemployment and the increasing number of young people who are NEET — over 40,000? Will he give a commitment to the House today that the engagement with young people that he refers to will be done in a meaningful way, that they will be part of the substantive discussions and that they will have a role, so that we will have a creative, purpose-built plan for Northern Ireland and not something that is taken off a shelf elsewhere?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ramsey for his comments. The review is happening under devolution, and we wish to shape it to fit in with the needs of our local economy and our young people. I concur with him that we need to engage directly with young people so that we can find out what they require. Although we stress that, in part, this is about ensuring that we address the needs of the economy and employers, it is also about addressing the needs of young people and their aspirations for their own life and career.

The Member quite rightly identifies problems that we have with youth unemployment and NEETs. He will be aware of the youth employment scheme that we launched and the wider NEETs strategy, which are already beginning to have an effect in providing young people with greater opportunities.

It is important to recognise that at present we have, in effect, a youth guarantee in that Training for Success is open to any 16- and 17-year-olds who find themselves out of school with no job available, but it is not compulsory, and not every young person will be part of that. We also want to encourage young people to think about an apprenticeship, but a lot of them may not be in a position to begin to think about that. So we need to ensure that we have proper pathways in place that can link a young person leaving school with an apprenticeship in due course or provide them with training to obtain a job or to enter into full-time education again. A core aspect of what we are taking forward is not just about reviewing apprenticeships; it is about reviewing youth training and ensuring that we have a full spectrum of interventions.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement, and I commend him and his staff for their dedication to duty despite the many pressures that the Department has to endure. On a couple of occasions, the Minister referred to gold standard aims for Northern Ireland. Will he tell us what emphasis he places on higher level apprenticeships in Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and for his nice remarks about the Department, surprisingly enough.

The issue of higher level apprenticeships is critical. We have a skills strategy, which clearly identifies that we need to move people up the skills ladder at levels 2 and 3, and particularly at level 4 and above. We know where we need to be if Northern Ireland is to be competitive internationally by 2020, and we know that proportionately more of the jobs to be created will require higher level skills. We need to ensure that we are progressing our young people to those levels of attainment, but, in doing so, it is important to stress that we are not talking about everyone having to go through a formal academic route and getting a

foundation degree or a bachelor's degree, although young people may progress to those through apprenticeships.

The apprenticeship model and higher level apprenticeships are an alternative way to take young people who may have different backgrounds, skills and attributes and delivering them to higher level skills because employers often need higher level skills. It is important that we consider the range of levels at which we will make interventions and the subjects that will be available for higher level apprenticeships.

Mr Ross: Like others, I welcome anything that aligns training and learning closer with the needs of the economy, and work placements can help to do that. As we know, traditionally, it has been difficult for some people to find work placements. What incentives does the Minister envisage government offering businesses that, up to this point, have been unwilling to engage in apprenticeships?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He makes a critical point. Apprenticeships will work only with the participation of employers. Government can provide a lot of support and can facilitate, but, ultimately, we need employers to create jobs and apprenticeships.

We have to acknowledge that the profile of the Northern Ireland economy is different from other parts of the UK and these islands. We have a much higher profile of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Historically, they have been more reluctant to take on apprenticeships, which they have seen as some sort of risk. Given that this is happening under devolution, it now allows us to tailor our support to address the needs of SMEs more directly than a more general UK-wide approach would have achieved. In doing so, we need to see whether there is a means by which we can manage some of the risk.

Some models have been applied in other jurisdictions, and it may be that SMEs will not be asked directly to employ an apprentice but that a pooling arrangement will be created that will allow the risk to be managed on a collective basis. We will certainly have a look at that.

We are also mindful that there has been a lot of talk from a number of parties at UK national level about a tax incentive around training. Obviously, any tax incentive is not devolved to the Assembly but would apply on a UK-wide basis. In turn, we need to think through the nature of our policy response to that, and it is important to plan ahead.

So, in the event that the current or a future Government move ahead, we can in turn rapidly put in place additional types of policy to capture the available tax incentives.

1.00 pm

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire agus roimh an obair atá déanta aige go dtí seo ar ráta na ndaoine óga atá dífhostaithe anseo a ísliú.

I thank the Minister for his statement, which was lengthy and had an awful lot of good content. I also thank him for the work that he has done so far on youth unemployment. How does the Minister plan to ensure that the expert advisory group has sufficient representation from the likes of the community and voluntary sector, which does an awful lot of good work in providing apprenticeship opportunities for people from disadvantaged communities, particularly rural communities? I am keen to hear from the Minister about that.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments, and I am more than happy to take his points in considering the advisory group's composition. Given that we are taking forward a Northern Ireland solution, we have to take the nature of the Northern Ireland economy into account.

I recognise that there is a rural dimension to this. We also have to take the profile of our economy into account. It is not just about SMEs versus larger businesses; it is also very heavily weighted to the public sector, and we have a smaller private sector than elsewhere. However, we also have a vibrant third sector in community and voluntary organisations, which have the potential to offer not just work placements but apprenticeships. We will seek to ensure that we take on board that feature of our economy, as well as the Member's suggestions.

Mr Newton: I also welcome the review. However, I am disappointed that the Minister described it as a short, sharp focus, because I do not believe that that is what is necessary. We need a fundamental review.

Like the Chairman of the Committee, I draw the Minister's attention to the programme-led apprenticeships. It is disappointing that, over three years, only 22% have achieved a level 2 qualification and have difficulty getting the necessary work experience. That indicates that employers are not buying into the programme-led apprenticeships. That stands in stark contrast to the employer-led focus of Apprenticeships Northern Ireland, where 80% to 90% of young people get full-time employment in their skilled area. How does the Minister envisage addressing the gap between the two types of apprenticeship programme?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Newton for his comments. Let me assure him that this is a fundamental review of apprenticeships and youth training. In essence, everything is on the table and open for discussion and reconsideration. However, I stress that we will not sit back and take years to do this. We have a fast-moving economy, and it is important that we seek to deliver within an ambitious timescale.

This will be a dedicated piece of work in my Department, and a number of civil servants have been earmarked to work almost exclusively on it over the coming months. I and my special adviser will also be deeply involved in this work over the coming months. So, it is something that we will be intensively involved with.

The Member shared some interesting statistics on the differences between ApprenticeshipsNI and programme-led apprenticeships. Those differences reflect the level of employer engagement. There are clearly issues around the programme-led apprenticeships that we need to consider seriously, including how that level of intervention can be better packaged and how we can better engage with employers. To an extent, those low figures reflect that there are people who will, potentially, not be progressing to employment. They also reflect in part the situation in our economy, where opportunities have been more limited.

Another piece of work that we need to look at, which will touch on this review but probably lies more broadly, is the forthcoming review of the careers strategy, which cuts across my Department and the Department of Education.

John O'Dowd and I are scheduled to launch that in 2014, but I am open to bringing it forward, if that can be agreed between the two Departments. I am conscious that, at present, there are many demands for employers to engage on work placements and work experience on a range of levels. We need to work out a means of better co-ordinating that and avoiding duplication in the system. That may be a key feature of the review when we get to it.

Mr Elliott: I note that the Minister mentioned the employer engagement plan in his statement. Will he outline how the Department is performing against the targets set out in the plan?

Dr Farry: The Member is right to highlight that as a key document. It is one of the key implementation documents arising out of the skills strategy. I am happy to share with him a full update on the strands within it. There are, if my memory serves me correctly, 20 different programmes, and I am confident that we are on schedule with the vast majority of those. We will seek to make sure that we deliver all of them by the conclusion of the first phase, later this year. I will come back to the House, probably in early autumn, to announce the second phase of the employer engagement plan, which is a strand of the skills strategy.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. This is a wide-ranging report, and, given the presentations that we have had in Committee on the subject, it is timely. At the end of the process, will the Minister consider the possibility of a one-stop shop, with an information-sharing aspect and an enhanced website, which would allow people to tap directly into information?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCann for his comments. I agree with him that this is highly relevant to Northern Ireland at present for a range of reasons. I am certainly happy to take on board his suggestions about communication, information and a website and, beyond that, the use of social media etc for all this. We want to ensure that that is a key aspect of the review.

Mr Hilditch: I have been closely involved in apprenticeship schemes while wearing another hat and have shared the bitter disappointment experienced by many. Can the Minister assure us of the robustness and scope of the review, particularly on the role of the employer?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Hilditch for his question. I am certainly happy to give him that assurance. Employers are the critical linchpin in all this, and the discussions that we want to have with them will perhaps be the most critical. I think that it is fair to say that employers are eager for this type of review to occur. They know that what we have at present is good, but we know that we can do even better and need to evolve rapidly and reflect the changes in the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome today's statement and support the Minister's work to offer apprenticeships and job opportunities to our young people. How big a change is needed in relation to the esteem in which apprenticeships are held in our society, particularly in the education system?

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for his question. That really reflects a theme that we have tried to get across today. It is important to present apprenticeships as a perfectly legitimate way of training and entering the workforce. They should be at least on a par with other pathways such as further and higher education. As we develop apprenticeships into higher-level skill areas, I think that parity of esteem will become even more obvious to people. Given that apprenticeships are much more linked to employers' job requirements, we can see a situation developing where they provide a more productive and successful route for young people to enter into sustainable and, indeed, highly-paid employment. That may, in turn, reinforce the message that we are trying to get out about parity of esteem. Careers advice can also play a role in that, as can addressing some of the cultural norms in our society, such as valuing, wrongly, one strand as more important than others.

Mr Allister: The challenge for the Minister is to turn his seven pages of aspiration into something that works and delivers. I am not suggesting that we can drop the German model into Northern Ireland, but it is hard to ignore the German experience — the most successful economy in Europe and youth unemployment of 8% — and then ask whether there is a correlation with the fact that 60% of their school leavers go into apprenticeships through their dual system and 30% are directed unashamedly down an academic route through their grammar schools. Does the Minister think that there is the maturity in the Executive to set aside the ideological blind spot about proper routes for those who are academically focused and proper routes through apprenticeships for those who are not?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Allister for his question and comments. Let me be clear: the German model is a very good one, and it is one that we wish to learn from. I am encouraged that a number of voices across the House are keen to take us in that direction. It is something that we have identified as being perhaps the key case study in the European context that we all want to look to. It is important that we set our ambitions to learn from and adapt to that as much as possible from that at this early stage. However, I caution the House that there are wider factors to do with our history and culture that may lead to us not being able to replicate all of that model as readily as some people may want. Let us go as far as we can.

Again, I stress that I want to see the development of alternative pathways in society. What we do with apprenticeships is not done in a bubble. Other things can be done elsewhere by way of public policy that may set things up better for people to take on apprenticeships in due course. Those discussions are taking place, and there are moves to address some of that in the education reform. Members will have their own views on exactly what direction we should go in and whether we should be more ambitious. However, I get a sense that others appreciate that this is something in which other interventions, right from early years, can make a difference by turning around different aspects of society.

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 11 February 2013.*

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 11 February 2013.

Mr Deputy Speaker: There are Ayes from all sides of the House and no dissenting voices, so I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated. Today's sitting may go beyond 7.00 pm, if required.

Spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next two motions relate to the Supply resolutions. As usual, I propose to conduct a single debate on both motions. I shall call the Minister to move the first motion, and the debate on both motions will then begin. When all who wish to speak have done so, I shall put the Question on the first motion. The second motion will then be read into the record, and I will call the Minister to move it. The Question will then be put on the second motion.

The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to four hours and 30 minutes for the debate. The Minister will have up to 60 minutes to allocate at his discretion between proposing and making a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have 10 minutes. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

1.15 pm

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

> *That this Assembly approves that a total sum not exceeding £15,459,758,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 and that total resources not exceeding £16,572,965,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3(c) and 2(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13 that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013.*

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

> *That this Assembly approves that a sum not exceeding £7,136,563,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund on account for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 and that resources not exceeding £7,641,877,000 be authorised, on account, for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and*

the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Vote on Account 2013-14 document that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

After the rather insipid cross-community support for the suspension of Standing Orders, I hope that this will be a fairly short debate. The level of interest did not seem to be huge.

Today's debate is an important step in the legislative process that controls our finance. The debate covers the final spending plans for 2012-13, which is the second year of the Executive's Budget for the period 2011-15. In the first Supply motion before the House today, I seek the Assembly's approval for the Executive's final spending plans for 2012-13 as detailed in the spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs) that were laid before the House on 4 February. Through the second motion, I request interim resources and funding for the first few months of 2013-14 in the form of a Vote on Account. I request the levels of Supply set out in the motions under section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which provides for the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make recommendations to the Assembly leading to cash appropriations from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund.

The amounts that I ask the House to vote in Supply for 2012-13 are significant: over £15 billion of cash, over £16 billion of resources and over £2 billion of accruing resources to spend and use by Departments and other public bodies in Northern Ireland. The first Supply motion sums up the spring Supplementary Estimates that are before us today for approval. I suspect that this reminder will be in vain, but I remind Members that the SSEs reflect all in-year changes made since the Main Estimates were approved by the Assembly last June. They reflect the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) changes agreed in the June, October and January monitoring rounds as well as the annually managed expenditure (AME) funding agreed by the Treasury since the approval of the 2012-13 Main Estimates last year. The debate today is about what we have spent, not, although I expect it anyway, a plea for what we should spend. I make that point before moving on. I can already see looks of scepticism around the House. People are tearing up speeches that they were going to make. If only.

Before I go into some of the detail of the spending plans for 2012-13, there are some important points I will make now. The SSE process that surrounds the resolution gives legal form to the financial decisions made by the Executive in the three monitoring rounds in this financial year. The Main Estimate process in June 2012 gave legal authority to the plans in place at that time. However, as we all know, things change. Unforeseen issues arise, delays occur and policy changes happen, and it has been necessary throughout the year to make changes to departmental budgets. It is a necessary thing. Indeed, it reflects good financial management that we are able to make budgetary adjustments to respond as the financial environment changes.

This necessary and important process means that the legislative authority that we put in place in June last year is somewhat out of date. We need to put in place new legislation in the form of a Budget Bill and SSE to reflect the 2012-13 financial year as we currently see it. Over the next few weeks, there will be a number of important stages relating to the Supply resolutions and the Budget Bill. Those are important pieces of legislation. It is equally important that Members appreciate that the legislative process that we begin today and will finalise over the next few weeks simply gives form to the 2012-13 Budget as amended by the Executive in the monitoring rounds this year. So, I once again make a clarion call for Members to use the debate to focus on the financial position for the current year. We have an opportunity to debate the changes that have happened and the allocations that have been made during this financial year, and, to facilitate that, I will outline some of those allocations in a moment.

As I have already said, I suspect that my call will fall on deaf ears and that there will be some in the Chamber who, as soon as they hear the word "Budget", will immediately think that the debate is a forum in which to plead for more money for this town or that town, this project or another project or to decry the lack of funding in future years for their area. I am sure that, once they start doing so, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will call them into line, the debate will be considerably shortened, and the suspension of Standing Orders that we moved earlier will not be necessary. People may get home in time for their tea, too. Although it is important that Members are given the opportunity to raise such issues, the resolutions before us today and the legislation that we will pass in the House relate primarily to this financial year, and I ask Members to bear that in mind.

I will now turn to 2012-13. This financial year has again been a difficult one for the local economy. However, there are indications — it is important to remind the House of this — that the economic climate is improving, even if somewhat slowly. The recently published Northern Ireland composite economic index shows a 0·7% quarterly improvement in the third quarter of 2012. A key driver of that performance was the local private sector, which recorded a 1% quarterly improvement, whereas activity in the public sector decreased marginally by 0·1% over the same quarter. The performance of the local public sector is not surprising given the tight public expenditure constraints imposed by the UK coalition Government.

Although the context is undoubtedly challenging, there have been great opportunities in 2012. One of the things that the Assembly must do, while not ignoring the difficult reality that we face at the minute, is to celebrate some of the landmarks and successes that we have had and the ways in which we have faced and overcome challenges in the past year. Our celebrations of the Titanic centenary were a resounding success. The Titanic visitor centre continues to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors and is a focal point for Titanic tourism. The Irish Open golf championship in July attracted many tourists from beyond our shores and was a great advert for the north coast. Recent news of increasing employment levels is to be welcomed, and Invest Northern Ireland continues to work with businesses here to realise maximum potential in our economy.

I also want to give Members some of the salient points in relation to the 2012-13 financial year. We began the year with an overcommitment. An additional £30 million

current and £30 million capital had been allocated to Departments with the expectation that, during the year, through monitoring rounds, the Executive would be able to recoup this through reduced requirements. I can confirm that this approach not only allowed additional funding to be appropriately planned for but it has also been effectively managed through the three monitoring rounds. In addition to eliminating the planned overcommitment, the Executive were able to allocate further funding throughout the year to high priorities and emerging issues.

In current expenditure, Departments surrendered £66·7 million non-ring-fenced resource DEL for redistribution in the three monitoring rounds. This compares with the equivalent reduced requirements of £65·7 million, £54·9 million and £80·9 million for the preceding three years. Northern Ireland also received £33 million resource as a result of Barnett consequentials from Her Majesty's Treasury. Taking into account central funds and funding to manage the overcommitment and ring-fenced resources, the Executive were able to allocate some £112·9 million to emerging issues in 2012-13.

On the capital side, Departments gave back £51·4 million for redistribution during in-year monitoring, which compares with £48·2 million last year. Again taking into account the management of the overcommitment and additional allocations from Her Majesty's Treasury, the Executive were able to meet capital pressures of some £115·3 million in 2012-13.

It is worth reminding ourselves of how some of those allocations were used to address issues that were raised by Members on a number of occasions. In 2012-13, the Executive allocated some 30% of available current expenditure funding to the Department of Health, including £4 million as a response to the pseudomonas outbreak, proving that the Executive can respond swiftly to significant emerging issues. Once again, our road network received a significant boost, with an injection of £7·8 million resource and a further £5 million for street lighting improvements. DARD received £6·7 million for animal disease compensation. The Department for Employment and Learning received £13·8 million for employment initiatives, and the Minister for Employment and Learning has just talked to the Assembly about some of those. The Department of the Environment received £1·5 million for emergency financial assistance for those whose properties were affected by flooding, and the Department of Justice received £10 million for the Prison Service staff exit scheme.

On the capital side, the Executive allocated £5 million to the Department of Education to address minor capital works in schools and £1·3 million to carry out repairs on the Arvalee special school after the fire there. The Department of Health received £15·5 million for a range of projects, including funding to address infrastructure risks, the expansion of the car park at the Ulster Hospital and capital investment as a result of the pseudomonas recommendations. DRD received £40 million for structural improvements to our road network on top of the £7·8 million of resource that I mentioned. DRD received a further £12·5 million for the replacement of buses for our transport network, which, as I have said on previous occasions — he never comes in to hear the good news — would bring joy to the heart of the Green Party representative who sits in the corner.

Mr Hamilton: He is in the electric car.

Mr Wilson: Right. OK. DSD received £19·8 million for — *[Interruption.]* Mind you, an electric chair might be more suitable on occasions. *[Laughter.]* DSD received £19·8 million for co-ownership and other housing initiatives, including £11·8 million under the Get Britain Building loan and equity initiative, which, of course, helps first-time home buyers who want to get on to the property ladder. DSD also received £4 million for thermal improvements to Housing Executive homes, which has allowed those on a low income to save on fuel and electricity bills.

Those are some of the notable public expenditure allocations made in monitoring rounds, but, as I have said in the past, Members must not forget that, in addition, provision was made in the annually managed expenditure exercises and SSEs in 2012-13 for, among other things, £2·9 billion of non-contributory and income-related social security benefits to the most vulnerable. This funding goes some way to protect the most vulnerable and provides mainly for expenditure on disability benefits, income support, pension credit, jobseeker's allowance and housing benefits. Members will be aware that, under welfare reform, that will be part of our DEL funding from next year.

My officials, working with Department for Social Development (DSD) colleagues, are in ongoing contact with HM Treasury on the wider welfare reform position. The House will be aware that we have secured a number of important regional concessions, and discussions will continue over further weeks to ensure that welfare reform will be implemented as beneficially as possible for those affected.

1.30 pm

Before leaving the detail of the SSEs, I inform the House that some additional headroom has been built into the SSEs over and above the January monitoring position. This has been done for dental services and health and social care trust spend in the Health Department, and for the staff exit scheme for prison officers in the Department of Justice to ensure that we maximise our spend at year end. That is necessary to ensure that no resources are lost to Northern Ireland under the Budget exchange scheme. The Finance Committee is aware of this position and has endorsed the approach being taken. It is critically important to emphasise to the House that such headroom has been included on the condition that if — I emphasise "if" — the resources become available, they must be used only for the agreed purpose, effectively ring-fencing the areas that I outlined.

I am sure that Members will endorse the actions taken; actions that will ensure that we maximise the funding available to Northern Ireland and utilise that funding for areas that the Executive have endorsed by providing allocations in this financial year.

I turn now to the Vote on Account for the 2013-14 financial year. The second motion before the Assembly seeks approval for a cash and resource Vote on Account to ensure the continuation of services into the next financial year. The amount of cash and resources proposed are an advance by around 45% of the final 2012-13 provision. I emphasise that it has no direct correlation to the budget allocations for 2013-14. Many Members have expressed confusion over this advance, and with your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will try to outline the necessity for this Vote on Account to help aid its transparency to Members.

The legislation in relation to the 2012-13 financial year gives legal authority for Departments to incur expenditure and to spend money up to a limit. Those limits are directly related to the budget of each Department and can be reconciled to the Budget. Indeed, this is done for each Department within the weighty tome — the Estimates document — that I see some Members have on their desk. This legislation is voted by this House twice every year, in June and again in February, to update the June legislation. However, the period between April and June every year is not, initially, covered by the detailed legislation, and legal cover is therefore required to allow Departments to incur expenditure. That is where the Vote on Account or the advance comes in. It is necessary to vote this now to enable services to continue into 2014, until the Main Estimates, which will reflect the detail of the 2013-14 financial plans, are prepared and presented to the Assembly for approval. I am not sure if that helps or hinders Members' understanding, but I will remain optimistic and assume the former.

In conclusion, I commend to Members the 2012-13 spring Supplementary Estimates, the 2013-14 Vote on Account and the Supply resolution as tabled. At the end of today's debate on the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account, I will endeavour to deal with any issues raised on them.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence from DFP officials on the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account for 2013-14. These are routine, though, by necessity, complex matters. I take this opportunity to thank the departmental officials for their assistance to the Committee in that regard.

The Committee has approved accelerated passage for the Budget Bill, which will be introduced by the Minister later today. That decision was on the basis that there has been appropriate consultation with the Committee as provided for by Standing Order 42(2), and I have written to the Speaker to provide confirmation of that.

As has been pointed out, the SSEs reflect the changes that have been made to the opening Budget position as a result of the monitoring rounds in June, October and January. Additionally, the Department has explained to the Committee that some headroom has been built in to give the Executive ability to spend any last-minute underspends.

During the evidence session on 30 January, the Committee examined the reconciliation between the departmental expenditure limit figures in the Main Estimates, which were agreed last June, and the SSEs before us today. That was an informative exercise, during which the Committee received helpful clarification from officials on the in-year technical changes to the resource and capital allocations for 2012-13 for a number of Departments. In some instances, the figures involved were substantial. For instance, the Department for Employment and Learning received £189 million under resource. That includes additional funding from the Treasury for student loans, which is ring-fenced for that purpose.

The majority of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) £28·5 million resource figure is made up of a £19 million transfer under the invest-to-save initiative that relates to Transforming Your Care. A further £6·6 million transfer to the Department of Health from DSD for programmes under welfare reform and the Supporting People programme makes up the majority of the £28.5 million.

The Department of Justice figure of £71 million is made up of reserve claims for policing, such as hearing loss at £24 million, and also £24 million resource and some capital for additional security. There is also a legal aid reclassification of £10 million from resource to capital.

The Department for Regional Development's (DRD) technical capital reduction of £23 million reflects some additions for public realm works, for which it would get additional capital from DSD, as well as reflecting the £30 million reduction for the A5, which relates to the reinvestment and reform initiative.

The scale of those technical changes, combined with the cumulative changes resulting from the normal reallocations through monitoring rounds, will, in some cases, have resulted in significant differences between the opening and closing resource and capital allocations of Departments. In that regard, it will be important that all Statutory Committees have satisfied themselves as to the reasons for and timing of any significant levels of easements or returns of moneys during the in-year monitoring process, and that the necessary assurances have been received on any concerns raised with Departments in terms of minimising year-end underspend.

As regards its own expenditure, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) had easements totalling £7·5 million in resource and £2·5 million in capital, which is significant in terms of DFP's relatively small budget. During oral evidence, the Committee queried why the Department's business plan classified the risk of not meeting the 1·5% underspend target as amber, and the Departmental officials assured members that, while it was difficult to predict with any certainty, indications at that point were that the Department was on target to meet its year-end underspend targets.

A sizeable proportion of the Department's in-year surrender of moneys related to Land and Property Services (LPS). The Committee has, on several occasions, raised concerns about the amounts of money being returned to the centre due to a reduction in the salaries budget. Members pressed officials and, indeed, the Minister about the effect that that will have on front line services. Robust assurances were received that LPS had used its budget as best as possible and that neither rate nor debt collection would be affected by that reduction.

While we should welcome the prudent and timely surrender of money by Departments during the monitoring process, it will be important that Committees and members continue to scrutinise that area closely. In that regard, I believe that DFP should be leading by example, and perhaps the Minister will wish to pick up on that point when closing today's debate.

As regards the headroom that I mentioned earlier, the Committee has previously considered the inclusion of headroom in the SSEs and understands that, while the Estimates need to be firm and realistic, that is a necessary measure in the event that significant sums of unanticipated reduced requirements may emerge in the final weeks of the financial year.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel was advised that headroom had been created for the Health Department and the Department of Justice. For the former, £15 million of headroom has been allocated for the health Estimates, £2 million of which was for dental services and £13 million for front line health and care services. The Department of Justice was permitted just over £21 million, allowing further resources to be allocated to the early retirement package for prison officers. The Departments in question will then have the Assembly's approval to spend up to that limit if, and only if, any additional funding is allocated to it. The departmental officials stressed that DFP's supply division will monitor the allocations to ensure that they are used only for the agreed purposes.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel has undertaken an active role in scrutinising the quarterly monitoring rounds throughout the 2012-13 financial year and has received timely briefings on the Department's position prior to each monitoring round.

I turn now to the motion relating to the Vote on Account for 2013-14. This is a practical measure that provides interim resources at approximately 45% of the 2012-13 provision. This enables Departments, as the Minister said, to ensure that public services continue during the early part of the financial year until the Main Estimates for 2013-14 and the associated Budget Bill are debated before the summer.

Speaking from a party perspective, I note that both motions refer to the Consolidated Fund. We need to debate how we can increase funding for Departments. The Committee for Finance and Personnel discussed that issue last week and looked at research that it had commissioned on Wales and Scotland in particular and how further powers and moneys are allocated to the Consolidated Fund. Those jurisdictions are having those debates, and we need to do that as well.

Wales, for example, has focused on the limitations of the Barnett formula and is looking at the devolution of setting income tax. Of course, Scotland has already achieved that to a great degree. We need to have that debate here because it will ultimately benefit local taxpayers and ratepayers. I hope that I have kept those comments within the remit of the motion.

On behalf of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, I support both motions.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): There is no guarantee that I will stay within the remit of the motion. However, I have endeavoured to listen to the Minister of Finance and Personnel's caution and his explanation of the process, which is much appreciated.

The Committee for Education reviewed the monitoring round information and questioned the Department of Education on its spending throughout the financial year. The Committee endeavoured to track the changes in spending that have manifested themselves in the spring Supplementary Estimates. I have to say, however, that that is far from an easy task because it is always the case that Departments are good at ensuring that they give you plenty of information but not the specific answers that you are requesting. I will come back to that issue in a few moments.

The Estimates are difficult to navigate, and the format of the document sometimes makes it hard to identify the key changes in budgets and spending. That is why it is useful that the Minister set out some of the changes in some detail at the start of the debate. I will refer to them in a few moments.

As other Members and Committee Chairs may say today, the scrutiny of budgets and spending is one of the most important elements of the work that is carried out in the House. To do that effectively, we must have a clear line of sight between policies, budgets and Estimates.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel has lobbied for change in the financial processes of government, and there is an understandable tension between departmental spending discretion and the provision of fuller transparency. Again, I will comment on that in a few moments.

1.45 pm

The Estimates for the Department of Education indicate that, in 2012-13, the resource requirement for education increased by some £65 million. Of that, £57 million was in the education and library boards and the voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated sectors spent £15 million. Much of that extra expenditure was associated with the payment of voluntary severance packages to teachers, which had been agreed in the previous year.

I think that it is right to remind the House that, in a period of over 18 months, our education system has lost something like 1,500 members of staff. Members, that is the reason why we are all hearing the teaching fraternity express concerns in our schools and boards of governors and in the correspondence that comes to our constituency offices. However, that is as it is as regards the process that has been undertaken to date.

The increases can be contrasted with the substantial decrease of some £4 million in the funding for the Middletown Centre for Autism. We, as a Committee, have expressed concern about the policy objective, and the way in which that centre was operated in the past raises a concern about the £4 million reduction. The Department has advised that the decrease was reallocated within the education budget and was brought about by the absence of match funding from the Department of Education and Skills in the Republic of Ireland. The Education Committee will be keen to progress that matter in the next few days and to ask further questions of the Department of Education.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: I will give way; yes.

Mr A Maginness: This relates not so much to your latter point but to your former point about the loss of 1,500 teachers. Does the Member accept that this is a very short-sighted approach to education in so far as the loss of those teachers means greater pressure on school staff locally? That causes more stress and sickness and a stretching of resources in schools, and, ultimately, it diminishes the quality of education. Our teachers are very hard-pressed, and I say that with some knowledge.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for the intervention. I agree with the thrust of what he says. Teachers are the key drivers and the key element of the delivery of our

education service, and I think that we need to be cognisant of that. The Department's rationale is to have larger schools. The Department's area plans, policy statements and comments are replete with references to larger schools. I think that, if you have larger schools, you will invariably have a smaller cohort of teaching staff, which creates its own difficulty. So, I think that that is an issue, and it is one about which the Education Committee has expressed concern in the past.

Returning to the issue that is before us in this debate, it is also appropriate that we record that, in the financial year, the Executive provided additional funds of some £6 million for minor works and to deal with the fire damage at Arvalee school. I think that we all welcome that that money was made available as a result of the process and changes in-year. The Committee visited Arvalee in October and was very pleased to learn of the extra allocation in support of the important provision for a special school in the area.

The Executive also provided very welcome additional in-year support for school maintenance of £6 million and promised a further £10 million next year. However, that is little in the overall backlog in our school estate, which is something in excess £260 million. So, there is a long way to go in addressing the maintenance issues in our schools.

As the House is aware, the spring Supplementary Estimates are, of course, also the basis of the Vote on Account for 2013-14. The Estimates reference the education and library boards, the Staff Commission, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. As Members are aware, the Education Bill, which is at Committee Stage, includes plans to dissolve those organisations and roll up most of their responsibilities in those of the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

That change represents a significant realignment in expenditure terms, and it is estimated that ESA will have a budget of well over £1·75 billion. Of course, a great deal of that money will be passed on to schools for salaries and other services. Nonetheless, concern has been expressed during the Committee Stage of the Bill at the creation of such a large arm's-length body as the one envisaged in ESA. If ever there was a time when we need clear understanding and scrutiny of the Budget process, it is when we have the creation of an organisation of the size and scale of ESA, as currently proposed.

The Committee has also sought access to the latest business case for ESA. However, that information has been relatively slow in coming from the Department. That information will inform us on the issues that I have raised. Members were told at Committee last week that much of the savings associated with ESA had already been made through the suppression of vacancies. It should also be remembered that, in 2006, the Department of Education brought into operation a vacancy control policy, which has never been amended. That is another reason why we are facing pressures in the system. Given the significant spending power proposed for ESA and the pressure on budgets generally, the Committee will be expecting more efficiencies from the new organisation, which, hopefully, will register in the Department's budget for 2014-15 and beyond.

There are a number of issues that I wanted to raise as a Member, including the issue of savings delivery plans. The Executive and the Finance Minister have set out a plan, policy and procedure for Departments to align their budgets with the savings delivery plans, and it is incumbent on each Department to endeavour to fulfil that requirement. It is with grave disappointment and concern that I register that the one Department that has been failing on that issue is the Department of Education. The savings delivery plans and the way in which the budgets have been aligned are issues that will not be going away. The Committee and I, as a member of that Committee, will endeavour to ensure that the appropriate information is laid before the House.

Mr Cree: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the two Supply resolutions, which, as you have indicated, Mr Deputy Speaker, will be debated together. I also thank the Finance Minister for outlining some of the detail involved and the work that Departments have undoubtedly put into producing all these statistics. In particular, the spring Supplementary Estimates contain a lot of figures, and I am sure that it was no easy task to collate that information. However, that said, this time last year we were enthusiastically hoping that it would be the last year of having to deal with the current form of statistics.

The review of the financial process in Northern Ireland, which has been talked about for many years, would provide better read-across between published financial documents, enhanced transparency and improved Assembly scrutiny. The Committee for Finance and Personnel produced a report to improve the situation, which was welcomed by the Minister and approved by the House. Regrettably, that is still languishing in the Executive.

Budgets are spending plans for years and do not convey cash or resources to Departments, nor do they give authority to spend cash or use resources. That is done annually through the Estimates and the relevant Budget Bill. There are different figures in the Budget, the Estimates and the accounts. The Budget covers the wider public sector, including non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), etc. Estimates and accounts relate to departmental levels. The Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence from DFP officials on 30 January 2013. We would have liked more time and had not the opportunity to study the full Estimates, which were laid last week.

I now turn to the two motions before us. The Supply motion seeks the Assembly's approval of the Executive's final spending plans for 2012-13, as detailed in the SSEs that were laid before the Assembly on 4 February. The second motion requests interim resources and funding for the first few months of 2013-14, in the form of a Vote on Account. The spring Supplementary Estimates are mainly technical and tidy up the loose ends that have been dealt with in the various monitoring rounds.

I will now highlight a few concerns that I have with the monitoring rounds. The main difficulty is the amount of resources surrendered by Departments, particularly towards the year's end. That can be only as a result of bad budgeting in the beginning, failure to phase budgets properly or the handling of efficiency savings.

Let me give you some examples, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) had a decrease in net resource requirement of over £20

million and a decrease in net cash requirement of over £38 million. The Department of Education requested an additional £5 million in-year yet returned that the following quarter. What kind of strategic planning does that represent?

The Minister's own Department is carrying £1·227 million as a non-Budget item for the Special EU Programmes Body. I ask the Minister whether that is likely to be spent in-year or whether it is, indeed, outside the Budget exchange scheme. Provision of £30 million remains for the settlement of the equal pay claim. I know that there are current legal challenges, but can that sum be carried over into next year without penalty in the absence of some sort of settlement this financial year?

The January monitoring round provided reduced requirements of some £30 million resource expenditure and £12 million capital investment. That makes the Minister's job — to ensure that resources are used in the most advantageous and value-for-money manner — very difficult. Departments need to take more care in the planning and managing of their budget.

I turn now to the Vote on Account, which is needed to ensure that the flow of resources continues to Departments. The Minister has said that that is usually around 45% of the Budget. That is not an ideal situation, as we do not have the necessary detail to scrutinise it effectively. Let us hope that this is the last year in which that unsatisfactory procedure obtains and that, next year, we will have a clear, transparent and, dare I say, logical Budget exercise.

I will support both motions today.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá an-áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht seo. I am pleased to participate in the debate on the spring Supplementary Estimates, which, as has been stated already, reflect the changes that have occurred in departmental expenditure against the amounts originally set out in the approved Budget. The motion seeks the Assembly's approval of those changes, which reflect sums redistributed as a result of the in-year monitoring rounds. Once approved by the Assembly, the SSEs are given legislative authority by the Budget Bill.

Mr Cree mentioned the need for a review of the financial process to ensure a greater degree of transparency. The Vote on Account makes provision for a proportion of next year's proposed Budget — around 45% — to be allocated so that Departments do not run out of money.

There are a lot of figures in the Estimates, and it is difficult to drill down to the detail. Rather than oppose the motions, I think that a more constructive course of action might be to ask some questions about the figures. One aspect of the figures that I am interested in is the amount of money that comes in from capital asset realisation.

I have asked a number of questions about that and about the revenue-raising options that are open to the Executive, and I believe that there are three main areas: the regional rate, the RRI borrowing and capital receipts. The Budget for 2011-15 includes around £900 million of additional spend over the four-year period generated through those revenue-raising measures. That includes an additional spend of around £200 million from the regional rate increase, but there is also more than £440 million of capital receipts identified by Departments and an additional £100 million of capital receipts identified by the central asset management unit.

2.00 pm

Is the Minister in a position to outline where we are with those two aims? How much of the £440 million of capital receipts have we achieved to date, and how much of the £100 million of capital receipts identified by the central assets management unit? I have asked some Assembly questions on that.

At one stage, we were told that quite an amount was coming from DRD capital assets. I asked a question about that, and I think that the Minister referred at one stage to four revenue-generating assets that were sold by DRD. In response to my question, DRD said that it has, in fact, only sold one revenue-generating asset, which was a car park at Kent Street in Belfast. That sale realised £300,000, and the car park was actually sold to the Department for Social Development. One begins to wonder whether that is additional money coming into government or money that is in government and keeps moving around. Perhaps the Minister will explain and elucidate that area of the financial situation.

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

I raised with the Minister during the January monitoring exercise in the House the issue of the £18 million that DETI had included in the Titanic signature project and which was refused by the EU. Is the Minister confident that that EU money is still available? Is he happy with the way in which DETI handled that whole debacle or is he inclined to investigate it? Will he send PEDU in to examine exactly what happened in that case?

Other revenue-raising options were apparently open to us. Belfast port was asked to contribute some £40 million. Has it contributed that £40 million? Will it contribute the £40 million? If not, why not? There was to be an £80 million contribution in respect of housing associations. I am reading that from a written answer that the Minister sent to me, and the words "there was to be" suggests to me that it did not actually happen. So, I have a question for the Minister specifically about the £80 million contribution from housing associations — have we received that, will we receive it or what exactly is the situation?

As well as that, there was to be a £12 million income from the new plastic bag levy. We are two years into the budgetary period and have not received anything from the new plastic bag levy. How much will we receive from that over the budget period? If these revenue-raising options do not produce the money that they were originally intended to produce, what will the shortfall be? I remember that, at the beginning of the budgetary period, the possibility was for £1·5 billion to come from revenue-raising options. The Minister then revised that to £786 million. That has now been increased to £900 million. That figure seems to fluctuate, and we need to know exactly what the situation is. If we are not to achieve the stated aim of raising £900 million over the four-year period, what will we achieve? If there is a shortfall, how will that impact on the numbers in the budget?

There are a number of other items that I would like to deal with, and time will probably not allow me to cover them all. I echo the point that Mr Storey made. My estimate is that the shortfall in the schools' maintenance budget is around

£300 million, and that has been the case for quite a while. The Minister mentioned that some extra money will be forthcoming to the Department of Education to address some of those difficulties, but it seems to me that that is nothing more than a drop in the ocean of £300 million.

Mr Storey mentioned the fact that some Departments are not providing savings delivery plans. Minister, what is the position overall with regard to —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: — efficiency savings? I see that the clock has beaten me to it, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the time to contribute. Go raibh céad maith agat.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): First, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish you and Members a happy Chinese new year: Kung Hay Fat Choy.

I welcome the opportunity to outline the Environment Committee's views on this motion. DOE's budget is not large in comparison with those of some other Departments, but this does not make it any less important, and it actually means that even small reductions can have a major impact. The Committee gave its support to DOE's proposed budget at the start of the year and welcomed the general direction of expenditure and priorities. Members accepted that constraints and prioritisation were unavoidable due to the required cuts, and they recognised that the ongoing decline in receipts from planning application fees was adding to the pressures being faced by DOE.

Staffing difficulties in DOE's planning division continue to concern the Committee. When income from planning application fees drops, as it continues to do, the impact falls directly on staff. The uncertainty that that generates among planners is being exacerbated further by the as yet unknown impact of the proposals to devolve planning functions to local authorities. This makes it a very difficult time for those affected, and the Committee is mindful of that, but also aware that DOE needs to ensure that robust and effective planning functions continue.

The Committee, therefore, welcomed the introduction of a voluntary redundancy scheme for planners under the Executive's invest-to-save scheme. The Committee supported DOE's bid to secure funds for it, and I hope that the scheme is managed effectively to address current planning function needs, with an eye on future changes. The scheme must not be short-changed, even if other priorities come to the fore.

The Committee is also very supportive of DOE's scheme of emergency financial assistance to district councils. The one-off payment to households that suffered exceptional inconvenience proved a lifeline for many during the several flooding events last year. However, on learning that significant flooding events have occurred every year, except one, since 2007, the Committee stressed the urgent need to address the underlying causes of flooding, where it happens repeatedly and regularly, rather than continuing to treat each occasion as a one-off emergency. No doubt, the money is a godsend to those receiving it at the time, but handing out funding in that way, year after year, is not a smart or sustainable way to address the problem. Those in receipt of the money would much prefer that their homes did not flood at all. Small, piecemeal funding is a very short-sighted approach to a long-term problem.

The Committee is also concerned about the use of revenue raised by the single-use bag levy. The scheme will come into force in a couple of months' time, and we must ensure that it delivers for the environment by changing people's behaviour. If the introduction of the levy leads to less money for DOE, that will be a sign of its success. It must not mean that DOE's obligations to the environment, such as river basin management, can no longer be properly funded.

I must also mention the Committee's concerns about the ongoing need for proper enforcement, whether it is enforcing the proper management of waste; ensuring the implementation of measures introduced to improve the road safety of goods vehicles; checking that taxi drivers are properly licensed for the safety of their passengers; or even just ensuring that planning happens where and how it should. Legislation is only as good as the measures that are put in place and properly funded to enforce it, and DOE must have the necessary resources to make sure that this happens.

Less clear-cut to the Committee is what DOE is doing to finance the local government reform process. Through the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), councils have made it very clear to the Committee that they feel that central government should carry some of the burden of the reorganisation. The Committee is aware that DOE has now made several bids in subsequent monitoring rounds to fund reform. All were unsuccessful. I am sure that everyone in the Committee is, like me, keen that the reform process progresses, but until we see the detail of the resources requested and why and when they are needed, it is difficult for the Committee to lend its support to these bids. The Committee wants clarification of the amount needed from central government and the rationale for the figures being suggested.

The Committee has been largely supportive of DOE's bids during the past year and, in considering the Vote on Account, stresses the importance of making sure that the necessary funds continue to be made available to the Department so that it can continue to deliver its programmes and conduct its functions effectively.

On behalf of the Environment Committee, I support the motion.

2.15 pm

Mr Girvan: I speak in favour of the Supply resolution for the 2012-13 Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account, and the DUP supports both.

I appreciate that we are making a spend of £15·45 billion for cash and around £16·572 billion for resource. I, too, think that we have an issue with regard to the financial process review and the implementation of that review, and Leslie Cree referred to that earlier. I appreciate that it takes an Executive decision to give us the transparency that we require when we look across the lines. That might not be available for next year, but let us hope that that is a work in progress and that we can get that transparency. When you look at the large block of spend of over £4 billion for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with very little detail included, it is extremely difficult to read across and see where it goes. We have also had

some difficulty in receiving information on spend from the Department of Education. We have heard about problems: the programme maintenance budget has not necessarily got the money that it requires for next time. We need to have more information on the accounts, rather than block headings that hide a multitude of other things. Too much has been given away to the Department to spend without it having to give a detailed breakdown of where that spend is going.

The Minister mentioned the exact mechanism that will allow us to make the spend. We approve the Budget, hopefully in June this year. I understand that there is a certain amount of overlap. The 45% equates to £7·136 billion cash and £7·64 billion resource. Information on the monitoring rounds has been coming through better than in previous years. Those Departments that identify shortfalls and release funds early allow the Minister to make adjustments and identify where that spend can be made.

Some people mentioned issues around Barnett. We welcomed an additional £30 million that we received from Barnett. Some people might be more encouraged by the fact that the Chair of the Committee mentioned other aspects, such as tax-raising powers. Some of us have severe reservations about going down that route in some areas, so I will reserve judgement on that matter.

There are areas where funds are being brought back to the centre through monitoring rounds and are not being allocated. Historically, I know that money has had to be given back to Treasury because some Departments did not volunteer it back early enough so that spend could be made. I am happy to say that that did not happen last year. I am hopeful that we will not have the same issue this year and that we can make the spend. A number of projects do not necessarily make the running. For example, there has been a delay on the A5 project and, as a consequence, that money has had to be reallocated during the year.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I also support both resolutions before us today. I thank the Minister for outlining the context and purpose of the resolutions and the importance of providing to Departments the certainty so that they can proceed to continue to roll out the Programme for Government commitments.

The Minister, in setting out the constraints and advising people against adventurism in respect of setting out their wish list, reflects that if we were to be perfectly honest, the discussion that we can have is very limited. Members have recognised that although the process that we have devised within the constraints on the budgeting process can always be improved, it effectively works. The monitoring round process allows the Departments to work in a sensible and mature way, and over the past number of mandates, you can see that improving. Reference was made to developing better financial forecasting and projections. To give credit where it is due, I think that that has also improved quite significantly.

There is a debate around the efficiency delivery programme about whether we are talking about cuts in front line services or genuine efficiencies. I know that there has been an attempt by the Minister, and I am certain that that has been replicated across the Departments, to ensure that we are getting more services, or the same services that we had, and that it is not a case of getting fewer services for less money. If people are delivering on efficiencies, we should proclaim that, but we have to recognise that the ability to address the issues in a strategic way would mean a budget process that reflects what that term means, as opposed to what an Administration might do with a fixed sum of money. I would like some assurance from the Minister today that he is taking some interest in the discussions that are ongoing in the Administrations in Scotland and Wales. They are beginning to explore the potential, and there is probably considerable benefit in the respective Finance Ministers exchanging notes and experience on that.

Having said all that, I think that the officials have satisfied the Committee's concerns. I am not speaking on behalf of the Committee but as a member of the Committee. They took on all our questions and responded, and, when necessary, they provided further information to the extent that I believe that, within the limits that I have mentioned — I am not going to stray beyond the boundaries of this discussion — our approach is correct. There have been one or two references to the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Fair enough, if those wrinkles are there, they should be resolved. I hope that our Committee might be of some assistance if the particular difficulties can be explained to us. As the Minister has previously acknowledged, it was the Finance Committee that developed the discussion and a proposition which, in fairness, he responded to.

If we look at some of the key strategic reforms that we have undertaken, such as the RPA and the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), we know that they take too long. We have made those decisions, and if that can be translated into efficiency savings or investment to save, you would include everything from planning processes across the board. The recent controversy over John Lewis indicates that there is work to be done there as well, and perhaps at some stage somebody will start to analyse the opportunity cost to our economy here.

However, I think that there should be no difficulty in people supporting these propositions that allow the Departments to get on with their work. The Budget Bill will provide the necessary authority. People may think about the next Budget round and how we would approach it differently, with a more proactive approach to how we can control our finances and amend the type of spending policies that we develop. On that basis, I support both resolutions.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Adrian McQuillan.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 2 and 4 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Public Appointments

1. **Mr Elliott** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they intend to take to review the process of public appointments. *(AQO 3343/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): The deputy First Minister and I have responsibility for public appointment policy and for making appointments to the boards of public bodies sponsored by our Department. Individual Ministers are responsible for making appointments to the public bodies sponsored by their respective Departments. An exception to this rule is the Police Ombudsman, whose appointment rests with the deputy First Minister and me but whose office is sponsored by the Department of Justice.

As part of our policy remit, the deputy First Minister and I appoint the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments, who has a statutory responsibility to publish a code of practice for public appointments and to audit departmental policies and practices to establish whether that code of practice is being observed. The commissioner publishes his findings in the form of audit reports. He has an important role to play in enhancing and sustaining public confidence in the appointments process by holding Ministers and their Departments to account.

Public appointments policy and the commissioner's code of practice are governed by the overarching principle of selection on merit. Ministerial public appointments are, therefore, made in accordance with relevant legislation, public appointments policy and, where applicable, the code of practice published by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Following the findings of the Fair Employment Tribunal in the case of Lennon v the Department for Regional Development and criticism from the commissioner that some departmental appointment processes had failed to fully comply with his code of practice, a cross-departmental working group of officials is looking at how compliance with the code can be improved and public confidence further enhanced.

Mr Elliott: I thank the First Minister for that background information. Have there been any detailed discussions with the Commissioner for Public Appointments about how that process may be taken forward to see whether Ministers abide by the code and principles that are already in place? Have the First Minister and deputy First Minister recommended any review of either the appointment process or, indeed, the appointment of those who are already in place?

Mr P Robinson: First of all, the deputy First Minister and I are absolutely determined that the process should fully take account of the recommendations and proposals that come from the independent commissioner. It was on foot of his recommendations that the cross-departmental working group was set up. We will look closely at the recommendations that come forward from that group and ensure that Ministers uphold them. This is a matter of public confidence. The public have to be satisfied that people are appointed to public bodies on the basis of expertise, experience and, indeed, the merit that their application holds. At the same time, there are some public bodies where there is a further requirement, which is that, as far as it is practicable, the board as a whole or the commissioners as a whole, whichever the case may be, are representative of the community.

Mr Dunne: I understand that two areas of inequality in appointments are in the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. What can be done to address those imbalances?

Mr P Robinson: In those two cases, strangely enough, there is an unusual situation in that, although responsibility for pay and rations and, indeed, public policy on those matters rests with the devolved Administration, the appointment of the chief commissioner and commissioners falls to the Secretary of State in the Northern Ireland Office. The deputy First Minister and I recognise that anomaly, and I believe that we have both asked the Secretary of State to look at that issue and to pass the handling of those appointments to the devolved Administration. She could, of course, do that as part of the legislation that she intends to introduce this year.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Given that many of the existing quangos were established in the period of direct rule, will the First Minister outline the number of such quangos, the number of appointees currently in post and any time frame for a fundamental review of all the quangos?

Mr P Robinson: Taking those in reverse, I can tell her that there is a review at present. We have an ad hoc group that is looking at whether we can reduce the number of quangos, whether some of the functions of those quangos can be taken into Departments or, indeed, whether some of the quangos, as she refers to them, can be merged. That work is ongoing, and it is something that we and each Minister will look at.

Most of the quangos will have representation that has changed over a period, so very few of them will have their original representation. I think that something like 300 or 350 positions in public appointments are changed each year. To be accurate, I believe that 1,634 public appointments are held, or at least there were in the last figures that I saw. That changes on a fairly regular basis, but I doubt very much whether there are any appointees from direct rule who have not been replaced. Of course, it is possible that appointees from direct rule have been reappointed by devolved Ministers.

Mr Eastwood: Can the First Minister give an update on the long overdue appointment process for the vacant Ilex board positions and the chief executive position?

Mr P Robinson: We went out to public advertising for those posts and received a number of applications. After officials had carried out the sifting process, it was the general view that there was not sufficient choice for the deputy First Minister and I to move forward. Therefore, we

are going to advertise again, if we have not already. I hope that there will be public interest and that people will put their name forward for the important positions of chair and board members of Ilex. It is a work in progress.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Executive Ministers

3. **Mr Allister** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have considered asking Ministers in the Executive to reveal the truth about their involvement with the past. *(AQO 3345/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Our statutory role as co-chairs of the Executive Committee confers no authority on us to require the disclosure of such information from any Minister. However, we expect all Ministers to act in conformity with the ministerial code, the Pledge of Office and the seven principles of public life.

Mr Allister: The First Minister can do better than that, surely. Does he recognise that a major problem attached to dealing with the past is the prevalent belief that the IRA will never tell the truth about the past? Therefore, does he agree that it would be a significant confidence-building measure if the terrorists whom he sustains in government were to publicly tell the truth about their past, instead of, for example, the deputy First Minister trying to pretend to us all that he mysteriously left the IRA in the 1970s?

Mr P Robinson: Of course we want everybody, whether a Member of the Assembly or a Minister in the Executive, to tell the truth. If he feels the way that he does, I am left wondering why he put forward a preference for a voluntary coalition with Sinn Féin when he did, rather than going forward with a mandatory coalition, as we do. However, anybody who has information about people's involvement in the past should give it to the PSNI. We firmly believe that everyone should be equal under the law and equally subject to it, no matter what their role in society may be.

Mr Campbell: The First Minister is a Minister without a terrorist past, but can he confirm that, if and when he is in the capital of the Irish Republic at a formal event — promoting jobs in Northern Ireland, for example — and there is a toast to the president of that country, he would stay and toast the president, unlike what happened at a recent event in London when the deputy First Minister did not?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Remember, the supplementary question has to be about the question.

Mr P Robinson: There should be nothing in anyone's past that should put them in a position where they fail to respect, tolerate and understand the protocols that are involved. Certainly, when in the Irish Republic, I have to recognise and respect its head of state. Indeed, I went to the inauguration of the new head of state of the Irish Republic.

Mr McDevitt: Given that reconciliation is a devolved matter and that truth and reconciliation are two sides of the same coin, will the First Minister today join me in calling on the two Governments and all parties in the House to sit down soon to develop an ethical basis on which to deal with our past?

Mr P Robinson: We have had discussions about how we handle the past. There is a recognition that, if we had had to agree on the past or our goals for the future before we set up this Administration, it is unlikely that this Administration would have been set up. This Administration was set up very much because we want to have a peaceful future for the people of Northern Ireland with a stable political administration.

It is vital that we deal with issues of the past. We do that through the considerable funding that we give to victims' organisations, and we have done it by recommending that it would be appropriate for us to build into the new peace and conflict resolution centre at the Maze some storytelling facility so that victims, without the harassment of cross-examination by lawyers, can tell their story and indicate the hurt that it has caused them and the effect that it has had on their life. I am not sure — I have certainly not had any indication — that there is agreement around the Chamber, never mind outside — not even in the victims' sector — on any one way of dealing with the past. In the absence of that overall agreement, we have to get the highest possible level of agreement. That is one of the issues that is outstanding for the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy. I hope that the parties will look at the level of agreement that it is possible for us to get now, no matter what their aspirations might be for future agreements.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his answers so far and the manner in which he is approaching this very difficult issue. He described the impasse. Does he agree, especially given the upcoming 15th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, that we need to make sure that dealing with the past is done not only in a sensitive and inclusive manner —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: — but in a way that recognises that all suffering and grief has equal validity?

Mr P Robinson: One has only to talk to some of the victims' groups and some people who clearly are victims but have not associated themselves with any of the groups to see the impact that the very long period of the Troubles has had on their life and the lives of their families. It is up to us, as an Assembly and Executive, to do whatever we can to reduce, as far as is possible, the difficulties that they face in their daily life as a result. Nothing, of course, can replace loved ones or make up for the very considerable injuries that have been caused. We live in a very small and closed community. Over 3,000 people have been murdered and over 30,000 people have been maimed and mutilated. That indicates that victims are throughout our society and that very few people have not been in close contact with those who have been hurt, injured or killed. In that kind of society, we need not only to look after the victims but give them hope for the future. I hope that the Executive can do that by showing that there is a better way than violence and that having a shared future is the future for Northern Ireland.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

5. **Mr Dickson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the sexual orientation strategy will be published. *(AQO 3347/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will ask my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We remain committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. Work is ongoing in the Department to publish a consultation document. The sexual orientation strategy will be published once the consultation process has been completed.

2.45 pm

Mr Dickson: You have to accept, junior Minister, that it is now six years since you published the original strategy and that, in fact, you or your predecessor promised the House that we would have the strategy delivered to the House by the end of December 2012. This is now February 2013.

Mr Bell: As I said, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister remains committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. Junior Minister McCann and I, along with officials from the Department, continue to engage with many from the LGBT sector in regular meetings, and I will bring that consultation document and strategy to the House as soon as I can.

Mr Nesbitt: I remind the junior Minister of his words to the House on 17 September last:

> *"confirmation to have that draft ready and out for consultation by the end of 2012." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 77, p107, col 2].*

Can he explain what has led to this slippage?

Mr Bell: We remain committed to publishing the strategy. The nature of the office is that we need to seek agreement. We continue to work with many people in the sector and continue, with our officials, to work through. We have to gain that agreement to bring the strategy to the House, and, when we can, we will do so.

Mr I McCrea: Can the junior Minister confirm that, following last week's vote in the House of Commons, there are no plans to change the definition of marriage in Northern Ireland?

Mr Bell: Yes, I can: there are no plans to legislate to change the definition of marriage in Northern Ireland. I have said in the House before that I believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. I say, equally, that I am against all forms of homophobia. I recognise the innate dignity and worth of every human being, whatever their sexual orientation, and I will continue to act and the office will continue to act against any form of homophobic bullying that exists in society. It is wrong and should not occur.

As far as your specific question is concerned, you will be aware that the House had a motion before it about marriage between people of the same sex. That motion was defeated by the Assembly on 1 October 2012. It is not an issue that is under active consideration, and we will not bring forward any proposals to redefine marriage in legislation.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Will the Minister comment on reports from the LGBT sector that his party — the DUP — has been dragging its feet in relation to the publication of a credible sexual orientation strategy for a number of years and is hostile to the sector's receiving equality of treatment?

Mr Bell: As I said, my party and I neither hate nor fear anybody of an L, G, B or T orientation. Therefore, by that definition, we cannot be homophobic, and we are not hostile to anybody.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

6. **Ms Brown** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the time frame for the publication of the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. *(AQO 3348/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: We remain committed to building a united and shared community by continuing to improve good relations across our society. Since devolution in 2007, we have significantly increased the funding available for good relations. This supports valuable work on the ground across hundreds of projects, building relationships and tackling sectarianism. Bringing forward a robust good relations strategy with a clear framework for action is a critical part of achieving our vision of a better future for everyone in supporting this work. We recognise the importance of translating the Executive's commitment into clear, meaningful action. Work on developing the strategy is at an advanced stage and will continue in the context of recent events, with a view to providing the most credible basis for the publication of CSI. The working group has concluded its current work, and the resultant draft document, along with a small number of key issues requiring further consideration, has been sent to us for discussion with party leaders.

Ms Brown: I thank the First Minister for his answer. What was his reaction when he heard the Alliance Party's proposal that he should establish an all-party working group to deal with these issues?

Mr P Robinson: That is tempting. I suppose that, if you want it in one word, it would be "incredulity". It is hard to fathom how the Alliance Party could walk away from and boycott an all-party group that was set up to deal with these matters and to get consensus among the political parties and, having done that, propose that we set up a group to try to reach consensus on these matters. It is an inconsistent position, and it is particularly inconsistent coming from a party that was set up on the basis of wanting to have consensus politics.

Any political party in the Chamber could walk away and come up with its version of what a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy might look like; it would be very easy for us to do that from our own positions. The real difficulty is in getting consensus across the community and all the political parties on how me might move forward. I am glad that some parties still want to carry out that work and have not walked away from the difficult task of reaching consensus.

Mr Lyttle: Is the First Minister willing to reflect on his party members' involvement in the distribution of thousands of

leaflets that incorrectly referred to the Union flag being ripped down?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The question must relate to the original.

Mr Lyttle: I am coming to the point. What impact has that had on cohesion, sharing and integration in this society?

Mr P Robinson: There will be people right across Northern Ireland who will find it difficult to understand why the Alliance Party would put its hand to changing a settled status quo in Belfast City Council with the resultant difficulties we have all had to face. They then try to tell us that it is somehow a compromise to fly a flag on one building in the city council area for 18 days a year and not at all on two other buildings. How is that a compromise from all three buildings flying a flag 365 days a year?

I hope that the Member and his colleagues will reflect on the issue and perhaps recognise the damage they have caused by aligning themselves with Sinn Féin and the SDLP. The next time a vote of a similar character comes to any council, I trust that they will think of the consequences of their actions, rather than simply try to cosy up to Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that all supplementary questions must relate to the original question, which was on the CSI strategy.

Mr Hussey: An important element of any CSI document should be the issues of parades and protests. Will the First Minister advise what work is being undertaken by his Department in advance of this year's marching season to ensure a safe and peaceful summer?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I have had a series of conversations on the subject with each other, other Ministers, the Secretary of State and the police. We have also talked to party leaders and have indicated that we want to bring them together. We had hoped to do that last week, but there was a difficulty with one party leader's schedule. It is our hope that we can look at the outstanding issues, which, I think, everybody now knows are flags, parades and the past.

Mr Dallat: Although many will wish to wash their hands of guilt for what has happened in the recent past, does the Minister agree with me that the events on the streets have sent a loud and clear message that a strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration is absolutely critical and the time for dilly-dallying is over?

Mr P Robinson: Yes, and I hope that we will get co-operation from the SDLP as we seek to bring it forward. It is essential that we have as wide a buy-in as possible from the political parties in the Chamber. When the leaders meet to deal with the issue, I hope that we will have a co-operative spirit from all the political parties there.

The strategy has an important role to play. However, I do not overstate the case, because there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of projects on the ground where good relations work is ongoing. It is always easy for the press to pick up on where there is discontent or disorder, but it pays little attention to the thousands, indeed tens of thousands, of people who, every day, as part of their life, attempt to encourage good relations at every level of our society. So I trust that that was an indication from the SDLP that it will play a full part in getting an agreed cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

Peace IV

7. **Mr Hamilton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on a possible Peace IV fund, following their recent visit to Brussels. *(AQO 3349/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I travelled to Brussels as negotiations to conclude an agreement on the EU Budget for 2014-2020 entered a critical stage. We used the opportunity to raise issues important to Northern Ireland at the highest levels in the European Union. At the European Council on 7 and 8 February, European heads of state agreed the multiannual financial framework of approximately €900 billion. This Budget sets out headline funding for many areas of significant importance to our economy, such as the common agricultural policy; research and development funding; and structural funds, including the Peace programme.

One of the issues that required our presence in Brussels was to make a final push to ensure inclusion of financial provisions for a possible Peace IV fund. We raised the issue at a number of high-level meetings, including with the president of the Parliament and the president of the Council. Our request received a positive response and built on the considerable efforts already made on the issue. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to indicate that the current position is that provision has been included for €150 million for a Peace IV programme in the draft that is before the European Parliament, which must give its approval. It is a significant step forward, and we will continue to work with the European Parliament to secure a final agreement.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the First Minister for his positive news on a Peace IV programme. Was the important issue of Northern Ireland's regional aid status raised during his visit?

Mr P Robinson: Yes. During the visit, the deputy First Minister and I met not only the two presidents, as outlined in my original answer, but also three European commissioners. During all those meetings, we raised the issue of regional aid, which is very important from a Northern Ireland point of view. Regional aid provides us with the opportunity to take away some of the detriment caused by the differential in rates of corporation tax in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. If they take away our ability to apply regional aid to encourage investors to come into Northern Ireland, we would be at a distinct disadvantage. My understanding at the meetings that we held was that the commissioners were sympathetic to that point of view. Ultimately, of course, it will be for the final negotiations to determine whether we are entered as a footnote in the documentation that comes forward, which would allow us to have regional aid right across Northern Ireland.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the First Minister confirm whether both the Irish and the British Governments lobbied on our behalf for the new Peace funds, given David Cameron's opposition in the EU Budget discussions to increased spending?

Mr P Robinson: Several levels of negotiation take place. It is fair to say that the United Kingdom Government found

themselves in a difficult position — one might say, "Hoist by their own petard" — in that they were asking for a reduction in the Budget and therefore found it difficult to ask for an increase by applying for Peace IV funds. The Irish Government consistently argued the case for a fourth tranche of Peace funding, but Her Majesty's Government made it fairly clear at each level that they would not resist any such proposal. Although the draft that was passed has provision for €150 million, the new protocols require the proposal to go to the European Parliament, and it will be for it to decide how that vote is to be taken. There has been some indication that the vote may even be taken by way of a secret vote. I would be less confident that it would be passed in those circumstances than if there were an open vote in the Parliament. Certainly, however, when we talked to the president, he was reasonably confident that, if it was agreed by the Commission, it would be passed at the next step — the Parliament — perhaps with some minor adjustments.

3.00 pm

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 9 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Social Housing: Rent and Arrears

1. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Social Development what are the implications for rent levels and existing arrears when housing associations take over Housing Executive properties. *(AQO 3358/11-15)*

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): This is the beginning of a process of discussion and deliberation on the reform of social housing, and it is too early to speculate on the implications. We have a situation in which £1 billion worth of urgent work needs to be done on Housing Executive properties, and we do not have that sort of money at the moment. I believe that, with a new system, we will have the flexibility and the resources to deliver good value housing of a high standard for the people of Northern Ireland.

Annual rent increases have been a feature of social housing over many years, and are necessary to maintain standards. It is expected that future rent levels will be better aligned to planned investment and funding requirements. There should be a closer convergence between Housing Executive and housing association rent levels over a period of time. However, I also want to ensure that tenants are protected from any excessive or unaffordable rent increases. That is why I am proposing that an independent social housing rent panel is established, which will agree annual rent levels based around a fiscal rental policy that will be subject to Assembly scrutiny.

I will work with my officials to define the policy and framework within which the new rent advisory panel will work to achieve that. This is the start of a process to reform social housing and develop a sustainable financial model. It is too early in the process to discuss details of existing arrears with the Housing Executive and potential transfer of arrears to a bespoke housing association.

Mr Allister: My constituents and, indeed, the Minister's constituents who are Housing Executive tenants know that rent levels under housing associations tend to be higher. Therefore, there is a natural fear, given the direction of travel that the Minister is indicating, that the direction of travel for their rent is going to be upwards. I do not think he has said anything today that will disabuse anyone of that view. Is the fact that there are large Housing Executive arrears going to impact? Indeed, what is the present scale of Housing Executive arrears, and what is going to happen to them?

Mr McCausland: If you compare many Housing Executive properties with housing association properties, you will see that many of the Housing Executive properties — certainly in the case of my own constituency, and I assume it may be the case in the Member's constituency — are of an older type of housing. They are houses that go back to maybe the 1950s or 1960s, and which may well have a lower rent at the present time. However, when you compare those houses with the more modern houses built by the housing associations, look at the energy efficiency of the newer housing. Look at the savings in those houses around energy costs. It seems to me that, often, when you work it out — I have spoken to a number of constituents about this — you find that the amount that they would be spending on any additional rental costs would be more than compensated for by the reduction in the cost of heating the home.

I have been looking at some particular estates recently where the quality of the older housing is such because there has been so little done in maintenance, even in the houses that were built back in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly the 1950s and early 1960s, which were built post-war. They were built quickly to get housing built at a time of need, but they were built in a style and of a standard that is very poor and very energy inefficient. The people in those houses would benefit significantly from having a more modern house.

Bear in mind that the Rinmore estate in Londonderry was the first example of transfer to a housing association. Yes; in that case, tenants were subjected to increased rent, but they virtually got a brand new house, which is much easier to heat. They are therefore making significant savings on their fuel costs, which is practically offsetting the rent increase. That is the evidence from the first example that was brought forward.

The situation as regards transfer of stock to housing associations —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McCausland: — is something that we still have to work through at the moment. We are starting a process.

Mr McQuillan: What are the current proposals for the Housing Executive's stock transfer programme?

Mr McCausland: The current programme of stock transfer started off with the Rinmore scheme in Londonderry. In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, my officials are currently finalising a stock transfer programme that will see almost 2,500 Housing Executive properties transferring to the housing association movement. The programme will take place in a number of tranches, with the first tranche of 675 properties in 19 locations commencing in 2013-14. A second tranche of

922 properties in 19 locations and a third tranche of 798 properties in 22 locations will follow on from that.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I remind the Minister that there are houses in his constituency that were built in the 60s, 70s and 80s and are lying derelict, which people could move into.

The Minister is aware that there is no agreement at all as to what structures may replace the Housing Executive, and I am concerned about his position on rent alignment. Will he assure us that future rent increases will be dealt with within a public policy framework?

Mr McCausland: I have stated categorically that tenants should be protected from any excessive or unaffordable rent increases. That is the reason behind setting up an independent social housing rent panel, while the overall approach to rental policy would be subject to Assembly scrutiny.

Welfare Reform Bill: Underoccupancy

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the underoccupancy proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill in relation to possible evictions. *(AQO 3359/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: In recognising that the underoccupation restriction, commonly known as the bedroom tax, is a serious issue for Northern Ireland, it must be remembered that the coalition Government at Westminster have brought forward these proposals and, in keeping with the principle of parity, we are largely compelled to do the same. However, in order to help those people who are affected through the transition, I intend to put in place housing services that will provide support and assistance to those who are impacted. I have tasked the Housing Executive and the housing association movement with bringing forward an action plan, which I expect to receive shortly, that will provide a range of support measures to mitigate and support those households that are affected.

My priority remains to do all that I can to prevent evictions and tenants being declared homeless. I have asked social landlords to ensure that, as far as possible, all options are explored to prevent social tenants from being evicted from their homes. In addition, further support for the various groups of people who may be affected, such as those with children who have grown up and moved on, may be available, for example, by way of discretionary housing payments.

The housing benefit reform changes have identified the potential for stock mismatch and the need for tenant mobility. That has been recognised, and it is proposed that, from 2013-14, a target for smaller units will be delivered through the social housing development programme. Social landlords are asked to consider whether there are opportunities to bring forward smaller-sized accommodation, through newbuild schemes or reconfiguration, which will increase their stock of smaller accommodation or one-bedroom units in those designated areas of particular need.

I should also point out that, at the start of the current year, when the social housing development programme was brought forward, I challenged the Housing Executive on that issue and on the fact that account had not been taken of welfare reform and the need for smaller properties.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr McCausland: That issue has been with us for a long time, but we are resolving it.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer, but given the historical circumstances in the North and the lack of housing stock, when will the proposals be introduced? Does he seriously think that they can be implemented?

Mr McCausland: The Member speaks about the historical situation. Unfortunately, in the past, the social housing development programme did not take account of the situation, even though people knew for a while that changes were coming. Indeed, a better range of accommodation should have been provided in the social housing development programme over quite a number of years.

We are looking at measures that will be brought forward fairly soon. I believe that those measures will go a long way towards addressing the issue. However, it is a problem not of our making. This has been introduced by the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition Government so is effectively being foisted on us. We cannot shake our heads and hope that it will go away. We cannot just pretend that it will go away. It faces us and confronts us directly. We must look at what is possible, which is what I am trying to do at the moment.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí. I listened very carefully to the Minister's suggestion about the need for smaller accommodation to ensure that people do not fall into the pitfalls associated with the worst excesses of welfare reform. Will he provide us with some detail of his discussions with the housing association movement? What stipulations is his Department imposing to ensure that that type of accommodation is provided in areas where the worst excesses of welfare reform will kick in?

Mr McCausland: I have said that action should have been taken on this over a number of years. It should not simply have been left until this stage when welfare reform is directly upon us. We have known for a while that it is coming, which is why, at the start of the financial year, I directly challenged the Housing Executive, which brings forward the social housing development programme. I pointed out that it was a failure and shortcoming on its part that it did not build into its social housing development programme appropriate accommodation in the light of welfare reform.

When I simply asked officials whether they had taken account of it and the answer was no, I was obviously very much concerned. Housing Executive officials should have taken account of that. I subsequently called in the housing associations and the Housing Executive and spoke to them about trying to beef up and strengthen the amount of work that is being done on newbuilds and also about making sure that special account is taken of the need for smaller units.

The issue is very much on my mind, and I have been talking to the Housing Executive about it. The Housing Executive is in a better place than it was a number of months ago. We have a new chair, a new vice-chair and a

good chief executive. We are in a much better place than we were previously.

Ms Brown: Will the Minister outline what measures are being considered to mitigate the impacts of underoccupancy legislation?

Mr McCausland: As I said, I am committed to tackling the bedroom tax through building more homes and providing help, advice and support to those seeking to downsize. A telephone contact centre and housing advice service will be put in place to raise tenant awareness and to contact the social tenants affected to help them to consider their housing options. We also look across the water to see what is being done in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Measures will include promoting and assisting tenant mobility; helping tenants to move to more appropriately sized housing; where possible, supporting tenants in paying their rent; examining options that can be put to tenants who need to move to a smaller home; facilitating home swaps; and advising on how to take in lodgers or joint tenants. Other initiatives under way include increasing the provision of additional one-bedroom stock. My Department has also asked all social landlords to review their rent arrears policies.

It needs to be emphasised again that this is being imposed directly by the coalition Government. It is being foisted on us, and, therefore, we have to do what we can. I believe that the measures that I am taking will help.

Mr Agnew: The Minister mentioned discretionary housing payments as a measure that could help to mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax. Will he outline the criteria for those and whether he has any plans to widen the criteria or increase the budget?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that the Member will be aware that I announced an increase in the budget. I see the Member nodding, so he is conscious of that. The amount has been trebled, so it is clear that we have made a substantial increase. If there is a need to do more, we will certainly look at that. At the moment, however, it seems that the amount that has been set aside in discretionary housing benefit is adequate. The trebling of the amount in recent years has gone a long way, and that will continue. There will be a higher level for a number of years.

The key word is “discretionary”, and we will certainly keep a close watch on how it is implemented. It is being done to address particular real and genuine need, which is the right sort of approach.

3.15 pm

Belfast City Centre: Regeneration

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals and time frame are in place to address dereliction in Belfast city centre and help regeneration. *(AQO 3360/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: My Department has a strong track record in the regeneration of Belfast city centre. During the past decade, the Department for Social Development (DSD) began the process of reversing 30 years of underinvestment with developments such as the £400 million of private sector investment at Victoria Square and the £28 million public investment in the renewal of 14 of the main shopping streets.

I have set my Department a challenging agenda for further significant regeneration measures over the coming years. Those will include the Royal Exchange scheme in the north-east quarter of Belfast city centre, which has the potential to bring 3,000 jobs and private investment of over £360 million to help to remove dereliction and bring Belfast to its proper place as a modern, competitive and attractive city. The Bank Square renewal scheme will commence on site by June this year, with an investment of £4·4 million by the Executive to deliver more high-quality public space.

I will shortly be announcing the commencement of a design commission for the third phase of the Belfast Streets Ahead public realm renewal programme, focusing on Royal Avenue and York Street and going out to the proposed new University of Ulster campus on York Street. Later this month, I will also announce proposals for bringing forward development sites in the north side of the city centre that aim to attract private investment to complement the investment that the University of Ulster is making.

Those are some of the main items of work that my Department will be bringing forward over the short to medium term, together with our ongoing focus on the promotion of the city centre and my commitment to tackling disadvantage and housing-led regeneration across Northern Ireland. I fully expect the support of the House when I make the case for resources at the next spending review.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he give an update on the redevelopment work in the Castle Street area?

Mr McCausland: I think that the Member is referring to the West Side master plan. The Bank Square regeneration project represents the first step towards the implementation of the regeneration plans for the west side/greater Castle Street area of the city centre. My Department will also be publishing a development brief for a site on Bank Street, which was highlighted as a key development opportunity in the West Side master plan, before 31 March. Further opportunities are dependent on securing private developers to invest in the renewal of that area and obtaining statutory planning approval for individual schemes that are outlined in the plan. My Department will carefully consider the timing of bringing the proposals in the master plan to the market, given the downturn in funding for the property development sector.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the York Street scheme. Has he had discussions about the delay in processing that major redevelopment with his colleague the Minister of the Environment?

Mr McCausland: Quite a number of representations have been made to the Minister of the Environment about the planning application for the University of Ulster campus. Given that it will be one of the major changes in the north side of the city centre, I noticed that Belfast City Council has appointed an all-party delegation to urge the case for the development going forward. It will transform that whole area.

I have not pressed the Minister directly on that point. However, I take the opportunity this afternoon to urge him to move forward on it, expedite it and get it completed. The university is keen to move ahead. If it is delayed much longer, it will lose an entire year of intake, and it would be disappointing if the whole scheme were put back, effectively by one year, because of a delay that possibly could well have been prevented.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. When does he envisage that the proposed Royal Exchange scheme will move forward?

Mr McCausland: I announced on 18 June 2012 that I intended to make a decision later this year on whether to move forward with a statutory development scheme for the north-east quarter of Belfast city centre, where the proposed Royal Exchange project is located. My Department has, therefore, commissioned an urban regeneration potential study for Belfast city centre to examine the close interplay between retail, leisure and commercial office investment in the continuing regeneration of Belfast.

The study will aim to establish the current and forecasted economic and social development across those sectors to guide appropriate public sector support for new development to maximise private and public investment in the city centre. That study will inform my decision on the promotion of a statutory development scheme for the north-east quarter.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for his generous acknowledgement of the contribution that his SDLP predecessor Ministers made to the development of Belfast and for his continued dedication and commitment to the development of the city centre. Does he agree with the Minister of the Environment's decision to protect Belfast city centre by preventing development outwith planning policy at the Sprucefield site?

Mr McCausland: I am glad that the Member highlighted what he perceives to be the strong commitment of previous Ministers to the regeneration of the city centre. I am sure, therefore, that the Minister of the Environment will, as I previously indicated, want to move as quickly as possible in taking forward the issue of the University of Ulster. It is important that that is taken forward as a matter of urgency.

As for the question he asked, that is a matter of planning policy and is outside the remit of my Department, as the Member well knows. As Minister for the lead Department on the regeneration of Northern Ireland's towns and cities, I would naturally like to see clear, unambiguous planning policy that is in line with the regional development strategy.

Welfare Reform: Free Advice

4. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to increase access to free advice to deal with the proposed changes in the Welfare Reform Bill. *(AQO 3361/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: My Department already commits significant financial support for the provision of front line advice services in Northern Ireland. During the 2012-13 financial year, a total of £3·5 million was made available to fund front line advice provision — £1·6 million from my Department, and the rest from local councils. A further £3·5 million has been committed, from 1 October 2012 to 31 March 2015, to the Northern Ireland Advice Services Alliance Consortium, which is made up of Advice NI, Citizens Advice NI and the Law Centre NI, to provide regional support to the advice sector.

I am well aware of the potential impact that the proposed changes may have on claimants. My officials are currently engaging with the Northern Ireland Advice Services Alliance Consortium to agree how we can work together to best support claimants in dealing with the changes proposed in the Welfare Reform Bill. That engagement will continue throughout implementation.

Mrs McKevitt: Has the Minister considered including a clause in the Welfare Reform Bill to allow claimants access to independent advice?

Mr McCausland: At the moment, the Bill is in Committee, and work is ongoing. There are discussions around that, as the Member is, I am sure, aware, and I do not want to pre-empt what the outcome of those discussions will be. However, whether there are clauses here, there or somewhere else is not what matters. What matters most is making sure that we have the infrastructure on the ground to provide the services that people require.

I have clearly said that we have significantly contributed towards the sector, to the extent that I have already outlined. We are engaging with the sector and we will continue to do so. That is, by far, the best approach. As for the details of the Bill itself, that is a matter that will be taken up in the future, I am sure, on the Floor of the Assembly.

Mr Beggs: When constituents are unaware of their benefit entitlement, fuel poverty is particularly problematic. That is most likely to occur during a change in the benefit system. Does the Minister appreciate that investment in the advice sector will help to minimise the damage that could occur in extreme cases of fuel poverty, adversely affecting an individual's health and placing additional costs on our health system?

Mr McCausland: I am sure the Member is well aware that, since coming into the Department, I have placed a particular focus on that issue and highlighted the point that one of the major contributors to fuel poverty is level of income. Although there are some things we cannot do, one thing we can do to increase income is to increase benefit uptake.

There has been a very substantial increase in the level of benefit uptake in Northern Ireland in the past few years, particularly in the past year. We trebled the amount of benefit uptake because of new, effective and innovative ways of targeting those who are in the greatest need but perhaps have been not been claiming benefit. Therefore, it has been effective and continues to be effective. We can do even better, but we are doing much better than some years ago and will continue to improve the standard.

Licensing

5. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the review of licensing laws. *(AQO 3362/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: A public consultation on proposed changes to the law regulating the sale and supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland ended on 12 November 2012. The consultation document contained a wide range of

proposals, including further restrictions on mixed trading in supermarkets, where most alcohol is now sold. I have sought the views on greater flexibility for pubs, clubs and hotels. The consultation attracted wide interest in the community, with over 2,500 responses received. The vast majority were from members of the public, with 140 responses received from organisations, including drinks industry groups, retailers, health bodies, local alcohol advice services, councils, political parties, charities and faith groups.

I welcome the level of interest in my plans to make further changes to licensing legislation, and it is important that officials carefully consider the various views expressed. Given the large volume of responses received, drafting the report on the outcome of the consultation is taking longer than usual. I have asked for a draft report to be with me by the end of February, and it will be discussed with the Social Development Committee before deciding the way forward.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. I declare an interest as a Member who infrequently frequents a licensed premises. Can the Minister further develop that answer and please provide us with information on whether he is opposed to further extending licensing hours or whether he is still in the process of considering it?

Mr McCausland: If the Member had listened carefully to what I said, he will know that I said that we are waiting on the outcome of the consultation. It would be totally improper to pre-empt the outcome of that consideration and say what we will do until we have given careful consideration to the consultation responses. It would be an act of gross discourtesy to the people who replied if I were to say, "You have written in, but it does not really matter as I have made up my mind already." We are looking very carefully at what they have said.

Mr I McCrea: Can the Minister outline what he is doing to tackle the issue of cheaper alcohol that is available in supermarkets?

Mr McCausland: There is strong evidence of the link between alcohol consumption and related harm, and the evidence is clear that affordability is one of the drivers of increased consumption. Therefore, the price at which supermarkets sell alcohol, which is sometimes cheaper than bottled water and soft drinks, is damaging to our communities. That is why Health Minister Poots and I are in the process of commissioning research to model the likely impact of minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland. That will help inform our future discussions and decisions in that area and allow us to bring forward proposals that have a proportionate and positive impact on mental and physical health and well-being and the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Of course, similar consideration is being given to that matter elsewhere in the British Isles.

Mr Elliott: To get back to the issue of the ongoing review and consultation that the Minister talked about, has he looked at the experience of any other countries, particularly in the European Union, to see whether any good practice could be adopted in Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: I will not go into the details, because that would pre-empt the results of the consultation. However, yes, we have looked at practices elsewhere, and there is no point in going forward with that sort of work unless you look at good practice elsewhere to see what lessons can be learned, not just from the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland but other places.

Executive Committee Business

Spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly approves that a total sum not exceeding £15,459,758,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 and that total resources not exceeding £16,572,965,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3(c) and 2(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13 that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

The following motion stood in the Order Paper:

> *That this Assembly approves that a sum not exceeding £7,136,563,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund on account for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 and that resources not exceeding £7,641,877,000 be authorised, on account, for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Vote on Account 2013-14 document that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the motions before the House today, as they are a necessary part of the financial process. I will be brief, because when you speak at this stage of the debate nearly everything that can be said has been said. I will take on board that the Minister said earlier that he is looking home for his tea tonight, so I will keep my remarks fairly brief.

3.30 pm

There is no doubt that we will continue to face challenges with the economy and that the economy is not as strong as we would like it to be. Nevertheless, we need to do the best job that we can with the resources available. There has also been good news in the past year. The Minister mentioned some of the tourism successes over the past year, and as a Member for East Londonderry, I was especially pleased to see Portrush host the Irish Open. I hope that this will bring a boost to the economy on the north coast.

The Minister raised a number of points in his opening speech that are to be welcomed. First, despite an overcommitment of £30 million at the start of the year, the Minister was able to reallocate almost £113 million of resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) and £115 million of capital spend through the monitoring rounds and an additional allocation from the Treasury, rather than giving this back to the Treasury. This money was used so that the Assembly was able to respond to various needs that arose, such as the challenges that we face in the health service.

Extra capital resource has been made available for schools, roads and Housing Executive homes, and this has to be welcomed. Despite what some Members think, I believe that this proves that the procedure of monitoring rounds works. In particular, I commend the Minister for the way in which he has reallocated the resources to those most in need, and I welcome the Executive's commitment to the health service.

I will take this opportunity to highlight the important work that has been done by the Executive, particularly by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the run-up to the autumn statement. Exemption from the carbon floor price will help to save consumers and businesses from significant increases in their energy bills, as well as protecting jobs that would otherwise have been put under threat. These resolutions are necessary for the work of the Departments to continue, so it is essential that they are approved. It is necessary so that they can do their jobs and carry out their functions, which many people in Northern Ireland depend on. I support the motions.

Mr Wells: My speech is somewhere outside. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, thank you for calling me, albeit unexpectedly early. I know that the Minister is keen to get home for his tea, and I only have a couple of thoughts in my mind as to what I want to say.

First, as the Deputy Chair of the Health Committee, I want to speak briefly on the finances of the trusts. The trusts are to be congratulated for the way in which, under very challenging circumstances, they have come in largely on budget. Indeed, I understand that the total expenditure of the Department was £12 million under budget. That sounds like a lot of money, but that is, of course, in the context of a total budget of £4·65 billion.

Some of the trusts, particularly the Southern Trust, have performed extremely well in what has to be one of the most challenging years that they have ever faced. They have managed to overcome some of the difficulties. There has been a remarkable improvement in the number of A&E waits of over four hours and 12 hours, for instance, in the Belfast Trust. The issue has more or less been put

to bed as far as the Southern Trust and the Western Trust are concerned, and we are still now left with the hard core issues of what to do with Antrim Area Hospital and the Ulster Hospital.

That having been said, it is quite clear that the health service in Northern Ireland is treating more people in more hospitals and more quickly than ever before at a time when demand for health service resources is increasing by between 6% and 7% and while income in real terms is increasing only by 1·9%. That is commendable.

The incoming year is going to be even more challenging. I have been speaking to some of the chief executives of the trusts, and some of them tell me that, although they were able to deliver in year 1 and year 2 of the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period, year 3 is going to be desperately difficult. Therefore, we will be relying upon the Minister acting as the fairy godmother, as it were, and doling out some money in the monitoring rounds to ease the situation.

I want to raise one specific and particular issue. In the incoming financial year, we have a remarkable opportunity to deal with the awful condition known as meningitis B. As a result of a vaccination programme that has been rolled out by the Department in recent years, we have effectively eliminated meningitis A and meningitis C from Northern Ireland. That is tremendous news, because I speak as someone with definite and very certain personal experience of meningitis.

We in the south Down community had a dreadful situation 10 years ago when a young lad aged three in Rathfriland died very suddenly from meningitis. I will never forget standing at the door of the church for that funeral and seeing the eyes of the parents of that young fellow and thinking about what they had gone through. Within 24 hours, he had gone from being a totally fit, normal and healthy young boy to dying.

At that time, there was no vaccine for meningitis. Now, we have just heard it announced, in February, that a vaccine could well be available in June of this year, for the final strain of meningitis: meningitis B. If that is possible, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JVCI) recommends its introduction in Northern Ireland. I think it is absolutely essential that we find the finance to vaccinate all children in Northern Ireland against that condition, because that holds out the hope that, from now on, any parent who sees his child developing flu-like symptoms will not be panicking and fearful of the awful condition of meningitis; it will be something more normal and less threatening.

This event has come about very suddenly, and, indeed, the Department was probably not even aware of the existence of that vaccine when it was preparing its financial forecasts for the incoming year. However, I hope and pray that we can find, either through the monitoring round or some additional resources, that we can vaccinate all children in Northern Ireland against that condition and that, in a few years' time, the various charities that have been established to campaign for and support the treatment of those who have had this condition will be able to wind up and close down, because the condition will have been removed from society.

The sad fact is that one in every 10 children who contract meningitis die from the condition, and many more are left horribly deformed. Therefore, it is very seldom that one comes across what we could call the golden bullet, the ultimate treatment for a very serious condition. However, it looks as though we are almost there — almost. Even though we are in a terribly difficult financial position, I hope that we can find the resources to deal with that.

There are many other issues that I could dwell upon. The capital budget of the health service is still under enormous stress. That having been said, despite very difficult and dark economic times, we have been able to introduce proposals for a new local hospital for Omagh, and the extension of the cancer unit at Altnagelvin is cast in stone, it is definitely going ahead and is very much welcomed by the communities of the north-west.

We all attended the pre-opening tour of the new South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen, and it is the most wonderful provision. Indeed, when it was opened, it was the most modern hospital in Europe. I said at the time that it was very much a case of "'Star Trek' meets A&E". It really is futuristic in the extreme. So, we have that wonderful new facility for the people of Fermanagh and Tyrone, open, fully equipped, and performing operations and many other forms of care for the people of that community. Therefore, I suspect that the people of the Western Trust area cannot say at the moment that they are being badly treated, as far as financial provision for health is concerned.

However, many of our other hospitals have seen better days. My own local hospital, Daisy Hill, in Newry, is a typical 1960s structure and has all the defects of that type of building. In an ideal world — and I know it will not happen for many years — we would demolish Daisy Hill and build on a greenfield site at the edge of Newry, perhaps near the motorway, and provide a fit-for-purpose, modern facility for the people of the southern part of Northern Ireland. I realise that, at the moment, that is not an option, and I accept that. However, certainly in the long term and for many years to come, we have to consider what we are going to do with that hospital.

Craigavon Area Hospital has its problems, and some of the other hospitals are past their sell-by date. I welcome the extension to the Antrim Area Hospital, as it will ease some of the pressures that I referred to earlier, where we are having real problems with four-hour and 12-hour waits at that hospital.

All I can say is that the health service — the chief executives and their teams — have done exceptionally well, given the economic circumstances that we are in. I am confident that we have a good strong team which will continue that work, but there will be storm clouds ahead in the year to come, and we depend on the Minister, at monitoring-round stage, to dole out extra resources for this hard-pressed service.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I support both the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account. I am mindful of the expectations and ambitions of the Minister with regard to how the next 10 minutes may go, and I do not guarantee not to disappoint.

I will make a few comments in my capacity as Chairperson of the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), and, after that, I will give some personal views on the two motions.

In-year, the Committee was briefed by the Department on its monitoring round returns and proposals, and I am pleased to say that it was broadly satisfied with the Department's approach. Following the Department's qualification of its resource accounts for 2010-11, the Committee has kept a watching eye on the Department's financial processes. Indeed, the Committee has since received regular briefings on governance issues in the Department and heard about progress on measures that have been put in place to address issues. At briefings, the Committee was assured by the departmental accounting officer that appropriate action had been taken to remedy the concerns and that processes had been put in place to prevent those issues happening in the future.

The Committee has taken a particular interest in the Department's capital projects and understands the importance of maintaining momentum in the regeneration of these sites to attract investment and provide jobs for local areas. The Committee visited a number of the sites to look at the progress made and hear further about plans for this CSR period. In January this year, the Committee visited the Maze/Long Kesh site to see how work was progressing. During the visit, members were briefed by the chair of the corporation board on plans for the site. The Committee will keep a watching brief on progress at the Maze/Long Kesh site as the €20 million peace-building and conflict resolution centre is progressed and, indeed, as the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society moves to the site.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, if I may, I will make comments on behalf of my party. I begin by acknowledging that the Ulster Unionist Party and, I believe, the SDLP, did not lend support to the 2011-15 Budget at the time, but we do not intend to jeopardise the ability of Departments to draw down resources by opposing the process at this stage. I agree with my colleague Mr Cree and with Mr Girvan, who spoke previously about the need for further transparency, to which I add the desire for a better read-across between the Budget lines and the targets in the Programme for Government. That is, I concede, a very difficult trick to turn, but it is one that I am sure that the Minister would like to see addressed as we go forward.

I have just seen a response to a question for written answer about an Executive visit to China. I was wondering how many officials accompanied the Ministers, who were they, where they stayed, what class of travel was undertaken and, generally, what was the cost of the trip. I regret to say that the Department is unable — or feels unable — to answer any of those questions. So when it comes to general transparency and openness, we have some way to go as an institution.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: I will certainly give way.

Mr Wells: Does the honourable Member not agree that it is a bit churlish to condemn the Department for not revealing that information? China is the second largest market in the world, it is growing rapidly, we have to be there, and it is essential that we are there at the highest level. Therefore, how could anyone be critical of a mission to China when, undoubtedly, we will gain enormously through trade for Northern Ireland as a result?

Mr Nesbitt: I thank Mr Wells for his intervention. I was not being critical of the trip, Mr Wells. I was being critical of the Department's unwillingness to detail the costs, the numbers, the class of travel and the type of hotels stayed in. They were all legitimate questions for a Member to ask and are in no way to be taken as a criticism of the undertaking of the trip.

I have half a dozen issues to draw to the Minister's attention, and perhaps he will give some clarity on them. The first relates to the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry. I believe that all Members were very pleased that the legislation was passed last year. We were also pleased by the level of co-operation between the Department and the Committee, which scrutinised and advised on aspects of the Bill.

We were particularly pleased that the scope was extended so that the start date is not 1945 but 1922. This may affect only a few victims, but, for them, it is everything to be included in the scope of the inquiry. However, we lack full clarity on the full costs of the inquiry. There are no Budget lines to cover the work that Sir Anthony Hart and his team will undertake, not just the establishment costs and running of the inquiry but what moneys may be deemed to be required to address the issue of redress. As the Minister will know, many victims will define redress as financial compensation, and I am interested to know what his thoughts are on that.

3.45 pm

A final thought on the abuse Bill: we know that it is investigating institutional abuse rather than the broader issue of clerical abuse. Will the Minister set aside a budget at least to scope out whether a further inquiry can be undertaken to bring in those who were abused outwith institutions?

Secondly, Members will be aware that £12 million was set aside for the delivery of a childcare strategy over the four-year budgetary period. However, only a minimal amount has been allocated to date. I am reminded of criticism from the likes of Siobhan Fitzpatrick, the chief executive officer of Early Years, who believes that we are running somewhat behind in getting a strategy out to consultation and that it is not rocket science.

Thirdly, estimates state that, at present, the social investment fund has a net provision of zero and a new net provision of only £600,000. I wonder if the Minister will agree that that shows the failure of the fund to get off the ground. It was £80 million over four years, which became £80 million over three years, and, now, clearly, it is going to be £80 million over two years. Will the Minister comment on the fact that an equivalent sum to the money intended for the social investment fund for this year has been channelled into six rather hastily arranged signature projects?

The flag dispute has highlighted many underlying issues, not least education, dereliction and deprivation. All those issues could and should be addressed through the social investment fund.

As I mentioned before, the Committee visited the Maze/Long Kesh site. The development corporation has a new net provision of £2·723 million. I would welcome clarification on how that figure has been reached. My party remains opposed to the location of a peace centre at the Maze prison, especially as we are now aware that it will operate at a significant loss. During our briefing at the Maze site a few weeks ago, the Committee was told that even if the projected number of visitors is attained —

110,000 per annum — it will still require a subvention of £650,000 per annum over the first three years. Why should the taxpayer be asked to stump up £2 million over that period for that facility?

Support for government and other services is the single largest expenditure in the spring Supplementary Estimates (SSEs). There is a provision of over £14 million. I am sure that the Minister will agree that the detail is rather vague, and I request that he break it down much further. What does support for government entail, and what are the other services that equate to such a significant sum of money?

With regard to OFMDFM issues, the Minister will be aware that a change in gross provision for victims shows a reduction of £590,000, leaving a net provision of just £79,000. I recognise that that operates alongside the new Victims and Survivors Service, which has a provision of over £2·5 million. However, I would welcome further detail on what has led to that other category having such a small budget?

Finally, to move away from OFMDFM issues, the Minister brought up the Prison Service exit scheme. I wonder if he can inform us about the tax implications for those who opted to take part in the first tranche of that exit scheme. What specific consideration was given to those people, and what were the tax implications for those who were going to engage in the first tranche before the scheme was rolled out by the Department of Justice?

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Initially, I will speak as Chair of the Committee. A couple of issues came up in the Committee that the Minister may wish to address.

In this year's Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) budget, a total of £10 million has been ring-fenced in the expectation that the issue of the EU nitrates directive and disposal of chicken litter would have been addressed. Indeed, we are all more than consciously aware of the possibilities of infractions that could ensue from that. Most of that allocation was surrendered in the October monitoring round. As the issue is still outstanding, it is important that we hear what provision is being made in the 2013-14 Budget to address the very serious issue of chicken litter disposal. I see the Minister laughing. *[Interruption.]* But for a lot of farmers — and probably for a lot of chickens, too — it is a very important issue.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment had the great opportunity recently to secure a debate on the small business research initiative. There is the possibility of dealing with Departments to help us to bring forward good projects because there is a lot of development of technology at the moment.

So, I would be interested to hear the Minister's views in relation to the £10 million that was ring-fenced and how that may dovetail with the efforts of the small business research initiative, with DETI and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), to make sure that this important issue is dealt with and that new technologies are brought to the fore to help to deal with it.

In the December monitoring round, DETI made a bid for £18·2 million resource funding in respect of the Titanic signature project. The Department informed the Committee that the bid was required to safeguard an equal amount of EU funding previously earmarked to be drawn down by the Titanic project. That bid was unsuccessful. Therefore, what are the implications for funding, particularly in light of a rather unusual departmental response to the Committee regarding the £18·2 million? It states:

> *"with the action undertaken by DETI, the write down will be offset by the £18.2m which will then be available for drawdown on other projects in future years meaning there is no shortfall or gap in funding under the EU Programme and no loss to the NI Block."*

The response further states:

> *"There has been, and will not be, any additional cost or additional government funding to the Titanic project."*

That all seems a bit unclear, so perhaps the Minister will clarify precisely where the £18·2 million, which seems to appear and then disappear, will come from, particularly given that the bid was unsuccessful. The Committee is aware that the requirement arose as a result of difference in legal opinion between the EU and the Department, which, apparently, has yet to be resolved. Is the Minister in a position to shed further light on the matter and whether that provision will be made in 2013-14?

Those are the views of the Committee. With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will speak in my own capacity as an MLA and chair of the all-party working group on construction. I pay tribute to the Minister for his co-operation with that all-party working group in delivering a number of proposals that are facilitating and helping the construction trade in very difficult times.

With regard to the green new deal, I know that there was an economic evaluation and appraisal carried out by the Department for Social Development (DSD), and it was ruled out. That economic appraisal was more or less throwing out the baby with the bath water; the good and the bad. If there were bad parts to it, good enough, but could the Minister, who is charged with the Budget, look at where we can spend to save? By that I mean that not only are we safeguarding the environment and helping to create jobs for the construction industry by retrofitting homes with insulation schemes and the like, but we are helping to tackle the worst excesses of fuel poverty. Those excesses mean that a lot of people, mainly older people, wind up in hospital at considerable cost to the health service while they are there and afterwards with community care projects and assistance in their homes.

Through proper investment in the economy, environment and home insulation, you can actually invest to make considerable savings in the health budget, aside from the economic, environmental and health benefits that would accrue to many members of the population. That is an issue that I would like the Minister, who has listened in the past, to look at. It has cropped up consistently at the all-party group on construction. I want to hear what the Minister has to say, particularly about how money that is properly invested can lead to savings and help to benefit the wider economy and society as a whole. On that point, I will conclude.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motions proposed by the Finance Minister today, and on behalf of the Alliance Party, I support them.

The debate presents us with an opportunity to examine how we use departmental finances to build a shared future, address inequality and foster sustainable economic growth across Northern Ireland. The Alliance Party believes that the best approach to rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy is through encouraging collaboration, whereby Departments work towards cross-cutting goals in a joined-up manner. We would, therefore, like to see much better co-operation between our Departments to make sure that we grow our economy effectively and maximise the efficiency and value of our public services.

On that note, the cross-cutting Executive investment in six signature projects, two of which involve the employment of graduate teachers without permanent employment contracts in one-to-one tutoring of our children, are a welcome development, as are the social enterprise hubs that have been created. There was some concern that they were created because the social investment fund was not on time. Notwithstanding the regret that that is the case, those are welcome projects to be taken forward in areas of key need.

Like the Finance Minister, we welcome the investment by the Health Department in the invest-to-save scheme. That is a positive development, although I would also have liked increased investment in mental health provision.

The financial aid released by the Department of the Environment to councils to deal with flooding and the £1,000 payments made available are welcome. In my constituency of East Belfast, I noticed just how damaging the impact of flooding can be and how vital those £1,000 payments are in helping people, especially the vulnerable, to get back on their feet. As was expressed today, residents would ideally like that investment to be used collectively for our infrastructure and systems to ensure that flooding is not as severe in the first place.

It would be interesting to hear from the Minister on the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) investigation into the early warning systems, how far we have moved on the flood line issue and whether there is a need for improved civil contingency planning to ensure that the resources we invest are used in an even better manner.

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

The Health Department and the Department for Social Development investment in Supporting People is also particularly welcome. In my constituency of East Belfast, I have seen money from the Supporting People fund used to help to house vulnerable women in times of need, which is an extremely welcome service.

We have had investment from OFMDFM for the inquiry into historical institutional child abuse, which has been most welcome. Concerns remain, however, about the speed at which we are releasing funds for the vital childcare services needed across Northern Ireland, which are often cited as the single biggest barrier to economic activity for many families across Northern Ireland and, in particular, for women.

I share the Chair of the OFMDFM Committee's concerns about the roll down of funding for the social investment fund. That £80 million was meant to be spread over four years, but it now appears that it will be squeezed into two years. As a result, there have been pressures on the social investment zone planning committees. They are being asked to roll that out in an extremely short time frame. I declare an interest as a member of the east Belfast steering group.

We must be willing to take measured risks with the investment of our finances in a way that maximises efficiency and output in the long term. Long-term investment in key growth sectors such as ICT, agrifood, the creative industries and financial services have been welcome and are crucial to the long-term rebalancing of our economy.

Long-term investment in tourism is welcome and vital for increasing visitor figures and spend in our cities. Building on the success of ni2012: Our Time Our Place, we must assure the world that Northern Ireland remains a safe and exciting place to visit.

Titanic Belfast in my constituency of East Belfast has been mentioned, and it is good to see visitor numbers for that centre reaching their targets and then some. Recently, we also had the East Belfast Arts Festival, which I would also like to see increased investment in going forward.

4.00 pm

Departments such as DCAL should have a focus on gaining the maximum return for our local economy. The Alliance Party's strong preference was for a shared stadium, but, as that could not be agreed, it is important that the proposed stadia upgrading and investment go ahead within timescale and budget to help to generate much-needed revenue and regeneration in sport and the construction industry, as the Chair of the Enterprise Committee said.

The Alliance Party also feels that the failure to use resources creatively for a green new deal has been a missed opportunity. It offered innovative means of creating sustainable economic growth, job creation and energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty. The employment opportunities that it could have provided range from high-tech manufacturing jobs to maintenance jobs at wind power plants or in sustaining and growing employment in the agriculture sector through biomass production. Research indicated that the targeted investment and growth of the renewable sector could create up to 30,000 jobs and that the short-term retrofitting of housing stock through the implementation of cost-effective energy-efficient measures would create and sustain jobs in the construction sector. We therefore urge that that be reconsidered and implemented at the earliest opportunity, if possible.

Building a shared society for everyone is the biggest social and economic challenge that faces Northern Ireland. It is simply not acceptable for it to be dismissed as an isolated issue. It is central to Northern Ireland's viability. The Alliance Party believes that we now have an even greater responsibility to tackle the cost of division, which, in the absence of any new Department of Finance or OFMDFM in-depth analysis, was last estimated to be around £1 billion every year. Indeed, the cost of policing the recent violence and unrest is estimated at around £15 million. That is an unjustifiable burden for our society and economy, and the inability of OFMDFM parties since 2005 to develop a new shared future strategy to settle community relations issues is an unacceptable failure of

leadership. I welcome the fact that parties are talking the shared future talk, but a generation of young people and those disengaged from society require us to take action and to invest resources in creating a shared and integrated society and economy for the benefit of everyone in this community.

Under Alliance Ministers, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Justice have introduced a shared future proofing policy appraisal system to promote sharing over duplicating budget allocations in their Departments. I call for that system to be brought into Departments as a way of making efficiency savings, avoiding duplication and promoting integration in Northern Ireland. The system could be used for future public spending in areas such as social housing, the provision of public services and facilities and many other areas. That good governance permitted the Alliance Minister for Employment to invest in vital employment opportunities for our young people that I welcome, such as the youth employment scheme and the work being done to advance the learner access and engagement programme, which accesses the hardest-to-reach learners in our community and gives them a pathway into further education. If Ministers from other parties support a shared future, it is time to see fundamental change in the way that we use our scarce finances. The social and economic future of this region depends on that.

Mr McDevitt: I will make a few remarks about the healthcare and social care situation and then a couple of more general remarks.

Without doubt, my party welcomes the much-needed £15·5 million that the Minister has been able to find for investment in health and social care on the capital side. As the Minister well knows, the pressures in health are many, and they are all very genuine. Members have made significant reference to the invest-to-save aspect of the current health budget requirements. Transforming Your Care is at the heart of that invest-to-save requirement. I trust that the Finance Minister will continue to cast a necessary cold and clinical eye on every aspect of Transforming Your Care. For it to work, it is important that investments that are made to save money down the line genuinely achieve those savings and are credible invest-to-save options. Many in the professional side of management, the clinical side, the representative organisations, the patient groups and a significant number of Members still have reservations about some aspects of Transforming Your Care being able to deliver the savings that are being suggested. I trust that the Minister and his Department's long-standing expertise in sifting out the potential from the areas that might not work will continue to be applied.

Other aspects of health and social care policy will present us with real and deep financial challenges, not least the cost of social care, which is the topic of considerable debate across the water today. It would be a great pity, given that we have an integrated health and social care system here in Northern Ireland, if we ended up having to ask people at the very limit of their means to make contributions to the social care of elderly people in particular that were well beyond their ability to afford. Such a scenario would be a breach of the basic contract at the heart of the NHS, which is to provide health and social care free at the point of delivery. I trust that the Minister will continue to respect and uphold that principle. As we reflect on and begin to face up to the challenges of providing an increasingly ageing population with social care in their third age, we must not do so in a way that cripples working families and provides little more than a shifting of debt from one generation to another.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he agree that, in previous Assemblies, all parties unanimously agreed that, at some time in the future, free personal care would be available to all who need it in Northern Ireland? It would be something similar to what is provided in Scotland.

Mr McDevitt: Indeed. I think that Mr McCarthy's long and consistent campaign on the issue is something that many people in the House will acknowledge. It is a policy objective that I am happy to support. However, if we are to credibly put a policy objective like that on the agenda, the Finance Minister will have to secure a very significant amount of money to pay for it. I am happy to join Mr McCarthy in saying that it should be a shared objective of all of us to explore how we would secure such moneys. In doing so, however, the invest-to-save bits of Transforming Your Care will have to work very well.

Another aspect of care on the edges of the health service that is worth debating at this point is dental services. There is considerable pressure on dental services at the moment. It seems to be a pressure that is at odds with or in the opposite direction of travel to the spirit of Transforming Your Care. In other words, it seems to be about taking NHS services out of dentistry or reducing the amount of dentistry that can be done at public expense. That seems to be contrary to where we are going with Transforming Your Care, which is about trying to get as much healthcare as possible into primary care. That also raises the possibility of downstream costs. If you make less of an investment in good general dental services across your population base, some people's dental health will, inevitably, deteriorate, which will cost the health service more money downstream.

Finally, I want to talk about efficiencies and opportunities on an all-island basis. Those are significant in the health and social care sphere, be it through the commissioning of specialist surgical and specialist secondary care services; greater opportunity for co-operation in the border region or along the border necklace, so to speak, in the primary care sector; the integration of emergency services in the border region; or the specialist and strategic investments that can be made in our very good and very modern hospitals north of the border. I think about the success of the cancer centre in Belfast City Hospital and the opportunity for further cardiac services to be developed in Altnagelvin Hospital. Significant opportunities that need to be exploited have been created by the beautiful new acute hospital in Enniskillen. It is a fantastic building that is open for business, and I, for one, would like to see plenty of business coming through its doors. For it to really work, it will have to be able to sell its services south of the border and into the neighbouring counties of Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and south Donegal. As the Minister anticipated, that is not exactly a matter for the Supplementary Estimates or the Vote on Account, but they are points worth making regarding the financial opportunities that are out there.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I am pleased to be able to speak in this debate. As Members will know, the Committee regularly scrutinises the Department of Justice's budget and receives detailed information on the monitoring rounds and savings delivery plans. When considering the budget plans and allocations, the Committee pays particular attention to the main spending areas and the pressures that are likely to impact on the savings plans and the delivery of front line services.

The main pressure faced by the Department of Justice this financial year is once again caused by legal aid expenditure. The information available indicates that this year's legal aid spend could be up to £107 million, compared with an available budget of £85 million. That leaves a shortfall of £22 million. The Department intends to fund that pressure from a range of easements identified in other spending areas and by switching £10 million capital DEL to resource DEL as part of the January monitoring round.

The cost of legal aid continues to far exceed the budget available for it, and it is clear that that is totally unacceptable. Despite the additional £39 million provided for legal aid and other court pressures as part of the devolution financial package, the funding required to cover the cost of legal aid now has to be found from other areas of the Department's budget. The Committee has supported changes to criminal legal aid fees, and that has resulted in reducing fees and costs in that area. However, there are a number of large, one-off, very high-cost case bills left in the system that will be paid this year, amounting to £10 million. Those have caused some of the pressure.

More worryingly, the other cause is a large increase in the number of complex, higher-cost, civil legal aid cases. In 2011-12, there were 32 cases, costing £2·6 million, compared with this year, when there are likely to be over 100 cases, at a cost of £8 million. For Members' benefit, the cost of civil legal aid has trebled over the past year. The Committee has asked for more detailed scrutiny of why that has come about. Criminal legal aid fees have reduced significantly, but there is now a spike in civil legal aid. We need to know why and whether there is a correlation between the reduction in the fees being paid in criminal legal aid and the pot of money for people to access now seeming to be in civil legal aid. We have asked for more detailed scrutiny of how that has come about.

When you operate a system in which there is little justification or rationale for the submission of fees, that leaves it open to exploitation, as criminal legal aid was exploited repeatedly by those in the legal profession. That is why I welcome and the Committee has called for changes to be made to civil legal aid. The Committee will look forward to scrutinising the reforms that the Minister intends to make in the area of legal aid expenditure. We will look at that in close detail and will be careful to ensure that access to justice is protected while value for money is achieved. It is imperative that the cost of legal aid is brought within budget as soon as possible, otherwise the impact on other spending areas in the Department of Justice will be unsustainable.

4.15 pm

In relation to the overall Department of Justice budget, in-year savings of £27 million had been delivered by 30 September 2012, which represents 59% of the total in-year target of £46 million for this financial year. The Department is on course to achieve this year's target and the total Budget 2010 savings target of £114 million by March 2015. There are, however, indications that, in a number of areas, such as the Probation Board, the Office of the Police Ombudsman and the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust, there has been an impact on front line services. The Department has provided some additional funding and intends to use the in-year monitoring rounds to assess pressures and, where possible and necessary, provide extra funding. The Committee will continue to scrutinise the impact of the planned savings on front line services during the 2013-14 financial year.

The Committee also welcomes the additional £10 million that was provided to the Department in the January monitoring round to fund the prison officers' exit scheme. That will enable more of the officers who have opted to leave the service to do so. In that area, it is important that Department and the Prison Service move more quickly. There are still hundreds of prison officers who have been put into category 3, which is the category that says their application to leave the service is still under consideration. For a lot of individuals, there is uncertainty around this, and people need to have that certainty so that they can plan for what they do when they are able to leave the service. Until we get to that point, that creates a problem in how the prison service is managed. It is an area the Committee will return to.

The Committee notes, however, that, as a result of this additional funding, the Department is committed to surrendering at least £10 million of capital funding in the 2014-15 financial year. We will wish to keep a close eye on the capital expenditure position. In particular, the Committee will no doubt wish to scrutinise progress with regard to the key capital project, the Desertcreat training college. The procurement phase is ongoing, and we will wish to monitor progress on a regular basis to scrutinise the time frame in which it will be delivered and whether it will be delivered within budget.

The police budget takes up almost 65% of the Department's budget, and £48 million of additional security funding from HM Treasury's reserves has been accessed this year as part of the spring Supplementary Estimates process. The mounting cost of policing recent unrest is of considerable concern, with the Chief Constable indicating that the cost so far has exceeded £15 million. Members will be aware that, given the current challenges and pressures, including the dissident terrorist threat and concerns over the long-term resilience of the force, a business case for increased resources to fund additional officers to meet operational requirements is being prepared. There is no capacity in the Department of Justice budget to fund additional police requirements, particularly on this scale, and we will wish the bid for additional resources from the Treasury to receive strong support from the Minister and the Executive. I support the Supply resolution for 2012-13.

Mr Allister: If I am being called, the Minister is obviously going to get his way with a short debate and we are not going to get anywhere close to 7.00 pm. It always concerns me a little when a Minister says, "There is nothing here. Let us move on". I sometimes wonder what the Minister may be trying to hide. Of course, in these 400 pages there may well be opportunities for exactly that.

I want to begin by exploring this question, and maybe the Minister, when he comes to answer, will shed some light

on it. We pass through the financial year with a series of monitoring rounds. Indeed, it is but 10 days or two weeks since we had the announcement of the January monitoring round. We then come to this final Estimate, within which the Minister tells us that he has retained "headroom"; that is to say, more money that he is unlikely to need in the normal course of events and will have available for special projects or spending. I suppose that the first question I have is this: why is that money simply not allocated in the January monitoring round, which is so close in time to where we are at this point? What is the logic of retaining what is called headroom? How much is that headroom? The Minister told us that he had retained some headroom. I do not think that he told us how much it was. I would like to hear that. He indicated that it could go to such eventualities as dental services, some of the health trusts and the prison staff exit scheme. Yet, if I remember the figures approximately correctly, in the January monitoring round, the Minister had bid for, I think, some £30 million. I think that he got only £10 million. Yet, here we are, 10 or 14 days later, with the Minister telling us that, within the headroom, he has got more money for the prison staff exit scheme. I suppose that my question is: why do it that way? Why was that simply not allocated as part of the January monitoring? That is the sort of issue about which I would like to hear a little explanation.

On the matter of that headroom — I do not know how big it is — we have this stand-off or difficulty with the Titanic funding. Does the Minister anticipate utilising some of that? Or is there a logjam there because Sinn Féin is exercising a veto on that matter if the funding has to flow and be authorised through OFMDFM? Will he tell us whether that conundrum over the Titanic — I think that it is £18 million — is likely to be aided or affected at all by the headroom money, however much it may be?

On the general financial management issue, if I understand the figures correctly, they indicate to us, at page 7 of the Estimates, that, whereas the present net provision was £15·8 billion, the new net provision will be £16·5 billion. Now, that would seem to indicate an extra need or increase of somewhere between 4% and 5%. There may be two questions out of that. First, in the general national context, we have become so used to hearing of times of austerity and cuts, but where are the cuts that we have been threatened with — I am not inviting them — if we are able to manage matters so that there is, in fact, an uplift of something approaching 5% in the new net provision? Secondly, will all that money be spent, or will some of it not be drawn down? Is this an academic figure, or is it a practical, actual figure of the money that we are likely to spend? Perhaps the Minister will expound on that.

I turn to some figures that I always feel drawn to examine in these Estimates; I am afraid that old habits die hard. I have been looking again at the spend on the cross-border bodies. Not for the first time, I find that they generally need more, not less, and that the hand is always out for more money. Page 33 shows that the language body needs an extra injection of money. Something like a 15% increase is needed for Waterways Ireland's departmental overheads, and, on some other unspecified category, Waterways Ireland needs another £75,000. If we go to Tourism Ireland, on page 103, we find that it too needs more money, as does InterTradeIreland. InterTradeIreland then seems to be giving back £58,000. I do not understand that, but I suppose that InterTradeIreland may not have a lot to do sometimes, given that only 9% of exports from our manufacturing goes in that direction. I am just making the observation that, in the main, these bodies are costing us more than we anticipated this time last year and more than we set for them in the Budget.

The one that perhaps has not cost us much — there is very little surprise in this — is the Food Safety Promotion Board, which is generously surrendering £373,000. Considering that there is not a single job in Northern Ireland with the Food Safety Promotion Board — there is no one at all employed here — and one wonders what it is doing, that is something to be welcomed, but, overall, those bodies collectively are soaking up more this year than before. The one that I cannot find proper delineation of is the much-loved SEUPB. Strangely, it does not appear in the summary of DFP expenditure in the way that the other cross-border bodies appear in the summary for their Department. The only reference to the SEUPB is tucked away in non-Budget expenditure. Will the Minister tell us how the expenditure of SEUPB has been going, why it is not on the face of the figures and why it is that, yet again, in these times of apparent austerity, it seems that we are putting more money than ever before into North/South bodies?

I was not here for Mr Storey's contribution, but I think that he raised issues abut ESA. ESA, like SEUPB, although we know that it is costing money, does not appear anywhere in the Estimates that I can see. One would like some explanation of that.

I am always tempted to look at the expenditure of OFMDFM, and I note that it, as is its wont, seems to be lavishing money on projects that it had not budgeted for. I see that the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation now requires an increase of £2·7 million in its gross provision. Shrines are getting very dear, it seems. Then there is a figure that is suddenly included for strategic sites. Some £5·5 million, which was not required hitherto, is now required. What is the explanation for the spend on strategic sites? Why was that cost not anticipated, but now suddenly has to be met?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: Is it the case that the donation of some sites to the Executive has turned out to be a very expensive luxury indeed because of the cost of their upkeep? Sadly —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: I have indeed run out of time.

Mr Wilson: I thank Members for their participation in the debate. I will make it clear at the start that I did not wish this debate to be cut short so that I could get home for my tea. Unfortunately, after all of this is over, I have other duties to perform, including a function tonight. I was simply concerned about the health and well-being of Members and hoped that they would be able to get home for their tea. *[Laughter.]* I note that some have already gone, including some who participated in the debate.

I thank Members for their contributions. By and large, they listened to the points that I made and they tried to keep their speeches as relevant as possible.

4.30 pm

I will turn now to the contributions that were made by Members in the debate. I will try to comment on some of them and get through them as quickly as possible.

The Chairman of the Committee for Finance and Personnel raised a number of issues, the first of which was the importance of Assembly Committee scrutiny. Indeed, a number of Members made the point about the scrutiny of the allocations that were made by Departments and their savings delivery plans. The point was made about the accounts and the importance of the ability to scrutinise them, which, of course, meant that the accounts had to be presented in as transparent a way as possible.

I agree with all that, but I direct this comment mostly to Sinn Féin Members, because a number of them made the point about the importance of transparency, the simplicity of the accounts and the way in which we dealt with them and the ability of Committees to be satisfied that Ministers were using their budgets in the most effective way possible.

Unfortunately, whether it is about the review of the financial processes or savings delivery plans, it has been difficult to get Sinn Féin's co-operation on those issues. On a number of occasions in this Assembly, I have aired my frustrations that we have not been able to get the review of financial processes through the Executive. I have met those who have had difficulty with it and I have explained it to them. I thought that I had agreement, but that has not happened.

I appreciate the point that Mr McLaughlin made in his speech. I will be more than happy if the Committee for Finance and Personnel can help to deal with that logjam. I do not really care who gets credit for breaking the logjam, but I want to see the review of financial processes, into which the Committee for Finance and Personnel had a very important input, come to fruition in the Assembly, because it will help the scrutiny of the Budget.

As a Sinn Féin Member and not as Chairman of the Committee for Finance and Personnel, Mr McKay also raised the issue of the Executive's need to find other ways to raise revenue. He suggested that we should be looking at the greater devolution of tax powers. Now, I have made it clear on many occasions that I am not a great supporter of increased devolution of tax powers unless there are specific reasons for that. I find it difficult to understand the argument that we wish to see the devolution of tax powers so that the Executive would have greater availability of additional revenue.

If we look back at all the times when we asked for the devolution of tax powers, whether in the form of air passenger duty or corporation tax, we see that it has been done in order not to raise more revenue but to reduce the amount of taxation that we undertake. I am quite happy with that because I believe in low taxation, but if the devolution of tax powers is to give this Assembly the greater ability to raise money, let us be honest with people. I note that the Chairman of the Committee said that it would benefit the local economy and local taxpayers. Well, the only way in which local taxpayers will benefit is to have the devolution of tax powers with the purpose of reducing taxation. That would not be a way of raising increased revenue.

Of course, the more tax powers that are devolved to Northern Ireland, the more that we have to take responsibility for those. I have not heard anyone who supports the proposition for a referendum on the future of Northern Ireland mention the deficit in the revenue raised here. The more that you devolve, the greater the gap will be. We have to accept our dependence on the Exchequer at Westminster.

Mr McKay raised the issue of DFP underspend. I accept that there has been an underspend in the past. We are making every effort to meet the target. However, DFP manages a whole range of expenditure on behalf of other Departments, not least the office estate. To a certain extent, we are in the hands of the decisions and co-operation of other Departments when it comes to meeting those targets and trying to keep expenditure in line.

Mr Storey raised the issue of the 1,500 staff reduction in the Department of Education over the last year and talked about the importance of the savings delivery plans. I want to make clear that the only Minister who is not co-operating is the Education Minister. He has written to me indicating that he does not have any intention of co-operating with the examination of savings delivery plans.

Let us just remind ourselves of the purpose of savings delivery plans. It is to make sure that, if savings are being made within a Department in line with the targets set in the Budget, those savings are not acquired and brought about by simply cutting front line services as the first port of call. There must be a real search for efficiencies in the Department to safeguard front line delivery of services. If savings delivery plans are not open to scrutiny and the information is not made available to the Assembly, we do not know whether Ministers are simply taking the easy route and cutting front line services rather than looking for real efficiencies within their Departments. I do not know —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way; yes.

Mr D Bradley: The Northern Ireland Audit Office has produced a report on the Budget in the last Assembly term and the way in which efficiency savings were achieved. It pointed out that, in many cases, the so-called savings were, in fact, charges laid on to services and did not meet the criteria that define efficiency savings. Has the Minister acted on that report to ensure that there is no repetition of that practice in this term of the Assembly?

Mr Wilson: I cannot say how every Department has abided by that observation of the Public Accounts Committee. But that is why savings delivery plans should be available to Committees for their examination to see whether Ministers are delivering real savings. That is part of the Committees' job of scrutinising Departments. As I was going to say before the Member intervened, I do not know whether we could have avoided some of the 1,500 reduction in staff in the Department of Education through other efficiency savings, since there is not a transparency in the savings delivery plans of the Department.

Mr Cree raised the issue of the financial process. I think that I have dealt with that point. He also raised the issue of the amount of money surrendered in monitoring rounds. That is not always due to bad budgeting, and I do not think that I have ever made the point that it is. There are sometimes genuine reasons. The only plea that I make to Ministers is that, if you are going to identify that you are not going to spend money, do it as early as possible so that the money can be allocated.

He made the point about whether or not budgets were adequate. One of the reasons why we had the review of budgets and have moved some money about is because, given the pattern of reduced requirements during the monitoring rounds, the original budget allocations did not reflect the real needs of Departments in some cases. Therefore, changes for the final two years have been made.

Mr Bradley raised a number of issues. He talked about financial processes, which I have dealt with. He also talked about capital assets, a theme to which he has returned on many occasions, and whether we delivered on those in the past year. I will explain things to him again. During 2011-12, the planned capital receipts in the Budget amounted to £142 million. The total achieved was £171 million, so we exceeded the planned amounts by £29 million. In 2011-12, the asset management unit assisted Departments in delivering £2·8 million, which again exceeded the target of £2·5 million. So in 2011-12, we more than met the targets.

The target for this financial year is £22·5 million, and we will continue to work with the asset management unit and Departments to deliver that. We are slightly short of the target. We have identified £32 million, but some of that money will take time to deliver due to legalities etc, so we are slightly short of the target and are working to ensure that we meet it by the end of the year.

A number of Members referred to the Titanic bid, where the £18·2 million rests at present and whether that money is likely to be lost. I will explain it again to the Members who raised the issue. The Titanic signature project came in at cost. We did not overspend, and we were on time, but £18·2 million of the finance was to come from Europe. All the advice was taken on what we would have to comply with to draw down that money. We acted on the advice we were given, but at a late stage, Europe said that it did not accept that the way in which the procurement was undertaken was correct and that we were therefore not eligible for grant aid from Europe.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment could do one of two things. It could fight the decision, which would probably take until almost the end of this Budget period. It is fairly sure that it would win, but you cannot be absolutely sure in any of these cases. So rather than risk losing the £18 million, it was suggested — this was good proactive management of budgets — that money be taken from other government spending to pay for the Titanic signature project and have other Departments bid for the EU money. The Departments will have two years to spend that money, which makes good sense. The issue has not been resolved.

Mr Allister asked why it has not been resolved: it has not been resolved because there has been a dispute, which meant that it could not come to the Executive for approval. That is why it is built into the accounts of DETI, which, as the programme managing authority, will make the funds available, and they will be drawn down by other Northern Ireland projects. That is the sensible way forward. The drawdown of that £18·2 million of funding on other planned expenditure should mean that there is no impact on the Northern Ireland Budget. The money is simply being moved around: money comes from one Department to DETI, and the European expenditure goes to another Department. That is how the issue should be dealt with.

4.45 pm

Mr Bradley raised the issue of the Belfast port, and he asked what was happening with that money. I think that I indicated that there have been difficulties with it. That is one reason why I made it clear during the Budget process that we really should be doing those things robustly. It is unlikely that we will avail ourselves of that money in the next two years of the Budget. However, Belfast port has indicated that it could meet some of that by building some office accommodation, which would, of course, be ready-made office accommodation for DETI to put potential clients in. So, that would save money in the DETI budget, but it would not save the full £40 million, which is a pressure that will have to be dealt with.

He also raised the issue of the housing associations, which the SDLP claimed as one of its policies. Therefore, I find it rather strange that its Members do not quite understand the way that it works. It is not a case of us getting money from housing associations; it is simply a case of making less money available to housing associations through housing grants. Housing associations will then have to use their reserves or borrow to fill that gap. Therefore, we will get the same number of houses built but with less contribution from the Executive. That means that we would have the money to spend otherwise. So, we have not received any money from the housing associations, and if Mr Bradley had understood his own party's proposal on this, he would not have expected us to get any money from the housing associations in the first place.

Mr McLaughlin raised a number of issues about the monitoring rounds working. I cannot understand his party's resistance to the financial processes. If we went down the route that Sinn Féin wants us to, which would simply give us very broad lines of expenditure that meant that Ministers had the latitude to move money across without having to make reduced requirements, we would not have the ability to have money returned for monitoring rounds to deal with the kinds of issues that arise during the year. That is one reason why the whole financial process is important.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you for addressing the point. I have sought to understand both the reason for the impasse and what could be done. I think that the balance is between protecting Ministers' sense of autonomy through control over their budgets and delivery of Programme for Government commitments and greater transparency and read-across in the Budget. What perplexes me is why it has not been possible to find a formulation that would resolve that issue, rather than to have a stand-off.

Mr Wilson: I appreciate the Member's view on that. His is the same as mine, in that I cannot understand why the stand-off has continued. What is proposed does not remove Ministers' ability to move money within their own budgets. There is still a de minimis level of £1 million where they can move money and still make proactive management decisions that enable them to move larger amounts of money, albeit with Executive approval. There are other ways in which Ministers can still have freedom to move money about. However, we have to have some lines of expenditure whereby once we vote money to Ministers,

they keep the spending within what has been voted so that the Assembly at least knows what money is going to Departments for.

Mr Bradley and Mr McLaughlin raised the issue of departmental efficiencies. Those are monitored on a regular basis. To date, £445 million will be delivered in savings in 2012-13. That is £9 million more than the target set. Of course, that excludes the Department of Education, because it has refused to participate in the exercise. So, we really do not know what the level of savings is there.

Mr Bradley also raised the issue of schools maintenance. Again, that is an issue that the Education Minister has to deal with as a priority. I note that, during the year, the Education Minister was able to find £70 million to allocate from reallocations that he made in his own budget. He obviously did not put maintenance at a high priority in his spending. I would point out that we have made, and will make over the next two years, an additional £90 million available for education as a result of decisions that the Executive have made.

I turn to Mr McQuillan, who raised the issue of the carbon price floor and the exemption for generators in Northern Ireland, which is a significant concession from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury at Westminster. It will, first, save generation capacity in Northern Ireland and, more importantly, should keep electricity bills from going up by about 15% and make us less dependent. The problem was that if we did not have that exemption, we would have been almost totally dependent on generators in the Irish Republic for security of supply. That was a good out-turn.

Ms Lo, who is not in her place, raised the issue of local government funding. I am sorry that the Minister of the Environment has not kept his Committee informed about his bid. Apparently, he shared it with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and the councils but chose not to share it with his Committee. Maybe the Committee ought to take that up with the Minister. We had a discussion at the Executive last week, and I am sure that the Minister will inform the Committee of the outcome of that in due course. I am sure that the Committee will push him for answers and information about that.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for giving way. I cannot let the point go. Last week, when you were on the Floor, you said quite adamantly that there would be no funding for local councils. As an existing member of Ards Borough Council, I am very concerned about what is happening. Are you telling us today that there is a glimmer of hope that councils will be recompensed for a situation that is not of their making?

Mr Wilson: I do not think that I was quite as adamant as the Member suggested. Given that the Executive can change their mind, and have been known to change their mind on a number of issues, I do not think that I could have been as categorical as the Member suggested. I said that I believed that there are two elements of the funding: the convergence element and the transition element. I said that we would have to find some funding for convergence. I am sure that this will eventually be made known to the Committee by the Minister, but, as a result of discussions in the Executive, funding will be made available even for some aspects of transition.

Let me be clear: that money will not magically appear, but will be the result of money not being spent on other services. Whether or not funding the review of public administration (RPA) is regarded as a priority as opposed to some of the other things that Members have mentioned today, such as health and education, is a question that had to be decided. However, some additional funding has been made available, and the detail will be made known in due course.

Mr Storey and a number of Members raised the issue of Arvalee Special School. We have allocated £1·3 million to that.

Mr Nesbitt raised the issue of the childcare strategy. The consultation on that will finish on 5 March. A total of £1·182 million has already been allocated to a number of projects. I see him smiling, and I am sure that, if he were to intervene, he would ask why it has taken so long. Things sometimes take longer to process through the arrangements that we have — his party put those in place under the Belfast Agreement — than we would like. Nevertheless, we have ring-fenced money for the strategy, and the outcome of the consultation will properly inform us as to how it can be best spent.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much appreciate the Minister giving way. Does he not feel that, if he did not like the arrangements of the Belfast Agreement, he should have changed them at St Andrews?

Mr Wilson: Let me be up front because I never hide behind this: some of the changes that were made at St Andrews to try to make sure that Ministers could not run rampant in their Departments are part of the reason why the process has slowed down. Of course the more checks and balances that you put into a system, the slower that that system will be. It is one of the things that we have to live with, and at least I am being up front with the Member in saying that the processes are slow. However, we have to expect that, if we want checks and balances, we will sometimes not get quick decisions made. It is frustrating, and it allows things to be held back at times, but that is one of the prices that you pay once you start putting in those checks and balances. It is not just in Northern Ireland that we find that. The American President is finding it with all the checks and balances in the American system. There is a price to be paid if you want to have those.

It is the same with the social investment fund. The area-planning process is now well advanced. Eight to 10 projects from the steering groups should be available by the end of January, and those will be submitted to the Department on 28 February. We will then start to see the projects delivered on the ground.

Mr Nesbitt also raised the issue of victims and survivors' services, and the change in money that he referred to should be welcomed by him. It is a movement from back-office, administrative funding to actual services for victims, and I hope that he will welcome that movement of funding.

He raised a very important issue about the future cost of the historical abuse inquiry and what has been budgeted for that. There is no presumption about the outcome of the inquiry and over whether its chairman will recommend that there be financial redress. If that becomes apparent, it is a pressure that we will have to deal with, and a bid will have to be made by OFMDFM. It is not presumed at present, because it is impossible to do so. We do not know the numbers, we do not know the outcome of the inquiry and we do not know what will be recommended by the

chairman, so it is impossible to build anything into budgets for that.

I loved Mr McGlone's cheek. He started off by asking what we are going to do with chicken waste. He did not even smile as he raised the issue. There was no sense of irony at all. Perhaps he should have been asking not me that question but his party colleague, because there was a perfectly good solution for dealing with chicken waste, but the Minister from his party decided not to adopt that.

The Member quite rightly pointed out that it is creating a difficulty for the agriculture and food processing industries for the future, and, as a result, the money that DETI had available for dealing with chicken waste will not be able to be spent. The planning decision was made by the Minister from Mr McGlone's party. I just wish that he had lobbied the Environment Minister before that disastrous and short-sighted decision was made. I hope that we do not live to regret that decision for an industry that is growing by around 40% and is a big source of employment in Northern Ireland.

He and a couple of other Members spoke about the warm homes scheme and the green new deal. In 2011-12, we spent £15 million on fitting houses and improving their heating standards under the warm homes scheme. That is similar to many of the things that people are asking for in the green new deal. It is not called the green new deal, yet it does a lot of the things that people are asking to be done in the green new deal. The scheme creates a lot of construction jobs. In 2012-13, we will have spent £15·9 million, and, on top of that, there is the boiler replacement scheme, which was part of the green new deal. In 2012-13, £4 million will have been spent on that.

Mr Givan raised the issue of legal aid pressures. The insatiable fiscal appetite of the legal profession in Northern Ireland never ceases to amaze me. The Chairperson is quite right to say that there is a funding pressure of £22 million, and, in the monitoring round, £10 million was made available for that. That pressure will have to be dealt with by the Department of Justice.

Mr Lyttle talked about the costs of division. I have to say that, had the Alliance Party thought about the causes of division, we might not have had the ugly eight weeks that we have had to go through since it made the decision that it did in Belfast City Council, with all the problems that that has caused Northern Ireland. Rather than lecture us about the costs of division, maybe he and his party should reflect on what they have done to cause unnecessary division in Northern Ireland by their support for Sinn Féin and the SDLP on the issue of the flying of the Union flag. He also raised the issue of flooding incidents. The PEDU response to the flooding incidents, which has been discussed, zoned in on what we can do for warnings, co-operation and resources in order to address that. That is ongoing work.

5.00 pm

I move to Mr McDevitt's speech, which dealt with issues for the future: Transforming Your Care and the cost of adult social care. Both are big issues. Adult social care is one that we will have to deal with and which will cause great problems in the future, as the number of people over 65 increases. By 2025, there will be a 42% increase, and by the same date there will be an 83% increase in the number of people over 85. We talk about what we can do about nursing and residential care and the cost of that, and the Health Minister has a consultation out at the moment. We have to be aware that the cost of that will be enormous and, if we decide to make it a priority, there will be significant costs to other Departments in the form of reduced funding.

Mr McDevitt also raised the issue of Transforming Your Care and the costs of transformation. There is a cost associated with the planning, designing and implementing of those changes, and some £70 million has been allocated to that in the current budget. He raised the issue of dental services, and part of the headroom that has been factored into the remaining time of the Budget is to deal with dental services. If that money becomes available, it should be available to the Department. I emphasise the importance that is attached to that.

Mr McDevitt also raised the issue of cross-border savings. I must say something to the Member that I have said time and again: I have no difficulty with making better use of our resources, if they can be shared and we can buy in services from the Republic. Take the likes of Daisy Hill Hospital: the Health Minister has already said that, probably, its survival will depend on whether services can be purchased from it by the Republic. However, the record to date has not been good, because, for many of the services that are made available, the costs have not been recovered. We have done a paper on the savings and the costs of cross-border co-operation. The balance at the moment shows that we actually lose £11·2 million on cross-border co-operation as it exists at present. If we are going to have this, there must be a payment for the services, whether it is the sharing of school, university or hospital places or whatever, to make sure that we are not subsidising the Republic rather than making money out of the sharing of services across the border.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way, yes

Mr McDevitt: It seems to me that there must be a payment for services procured from anywhere else. If a Department is doing something for another Department around here, they raise a service level agreement and they sort it out in accounting terms. It seems to me only logical that that should apply in all aspects. I ask the Minister just to clarify the figure of £11·2 million: is that across all of government or does it just refer to health?

Mr Wilson: I can make the figures available to the Member. It refers to costs across all government Departments.

I come to the points that Mr Allister raised. First, he raised the issue of the increase from the present net provision to the new net provision, an increase from £15·8 billion to £16·5 billion. That is partly the result of a number of things: the Budget exchange scheme that allows us to carry money over; the Barnett consequentials; reserved claims; and changes in the annually managed expenditure, which, of course, is demand-led. Those things will have accounted for that.

Mr Allister also asked about the headroom and why we did not allocate that money in the January monitoring round. The figures for the January monitoring round are probably three months ahead of the end of the financial year by the time we make the January monitoring allocation. There can be and there are likely to be underspends during that

period. Under the Budget exchange scheme, we have a limited ability to carry money over. Historically, we can estimate the likely underspends that will arise between January and March and how we can avoid giving those back. We have made an estimate that the underspend could be somewhere around £37 million. That is judged on a historical basis. It is an estimate. It might be less than that, it might be more than that, and that is why I said, "If the money is available". We have ring-fenced it to those two things, because we know that the money can be spent by DOJ on the Prison Service redundancy scheme and by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the things that I mentioned, including dental services. The Treasury requires us to say where it will be spent if it becomes available. It is an underspend that will or could arise in the remaining couple of months of the financial year, and that is why it cannot be allocated in January.

Mr Allister also raised the issue of North/South bodies. It is important to note that all North/South bodies have to deliver a 3% year-on-year efficiency saving, and they have been delivering that. The apparent increases that the Member referred to are given by Her Majesty's Treasury to cover the bodies' reclassification as non-departmental public bodies. He will be aware of the issue, because he has raised it with me about some bodies here in Northern Ireland. Reclassification will require additional expenditure, but it does not represent an increase in real spend by the bodies.

I thank Members for their participation, and I hope that I have dealt with all the issues raised. I recommend the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account to the Assembly.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a total sum not exceeding £15,459,758,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 and that total resources not exceeding £16,572,965,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 3(c) and 2(c) of table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13 that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013.

Vote on Account 2013-14

Mr Deputy Speaker: The motion on the Vote on Account has already been debated. I remind Members that this vote also requires cross-community support.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That this Assembly approves that a sum not exceeding £7,136,563,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund on account for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 and that resources not exceeding £7,641,877,000 be authorised, on account, for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 as summarised for each Department or other public body in columns 4 and 6 of table 1 in the Vote on Account 2013-14 document that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Budget Bill: First Stage

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to introduce the Budget Bill (Northern Ireland) 2013 [NIA 18/11-15], which is a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the years ending 31 March 2013 and 2014; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for the years ending 31 March 2013 and 2014; and to revise the limits on the use of certain accruing resources in the year ending 31 March 2013.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I inform Members that confirmation has been received from the Committee of Finance and Personnel, in accordance with Standing Order 42(2), that the Committee is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals contained in the Bill and that the Bill can, therefore, proceed under the accelerated passage procedure. The Second Stage of the Bill will be brought before the House tomorrow.

Business Improvement Districts Bill: Final Stage

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

> *That the Business Improvement Districts Bill [NIA Bill 9/11-15] do now pass.*

I want to put on record my thanks to the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for their timely and effective scrutiny of the Bill. Given the continuing downturn in our economy, it is important for us as an Executive and as an Assembly to deliver whatever assistance we can, so I appreciate the efforts of the Committee, particularly during a time when it has a very full programme of scrutiny of other primary legislation.

I thank Members across all parties for their support for the Bill. We know from consultation exercises and discussions across a wide range of interests, including businesses and representative bodies, that there is a great deal of enthusiasm for business improvement districts. The primary purpose of the Bill is to allow for the establishment of statutory BIDs in Northern Ireland. This will bring us into line with the other United Kingdom jurisdictions and the Republic of Ireland, where such legislation is already in place.

As I indicated in previous debates, the Bill will be an important addition to the toolkit of measures available to help hard-pressed traders during the continuing difficult economic situation. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The BIDs legislation will simply provide a framework that will allow local traders to work closely with their local council to develop solutions to their unique situation, with the aim of attracting more shoppers and consumers into the BID area to explore what is on offer and spend money in local businesses. I, therefore, commend the BIDs Bill to the House.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing the Final Stage of the BIDs Bill to the House. The Bill was referred to the Committee for Social Development, in accordance with Standing Order 33(1), on completion of its Second Stage on 17 September 2012.

The Committee received 16 written submissions and took oral evidence from the NI Retail Consortium, NILGA, the NI Independent Retail Trade Association and the University of Ulster. Of course, the Committee also heard from the Department on the provisions of, and rationale for, the Bill. The Minister tabled two amendments at Consideration Stage. The Committee welcomed the amendment to clause 6, which means that all non-domestic properties can be included within a proposed BID area, whether or not they have an exemption from paying rates. Therefore, the tenant or owner will have the entitlement to vote on the BIDs proposal. The Committee acknowledged that it will be up to the BID proposer to decide which properties to include in the final proposals for ballot.

The amendment to clause 19 was tabled at the request of the Committee, following advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The amended clause will include two additional clauses, which are now to be subject to draft affirmative resolution. I thank the Minister on behalf of the Committee for bringing forward those amendments.

5.15 pm

I will not rehearse what was said at the previous stages of the Bill. I will, however, speak briefly on the key aspect of the Bill and what it will mean for businesses here. In short, the Bill will provide a statutory basis for the development of business improvement districts. If a vote to establish a BID is successful, everyone who is captured in that BID area will be liable to pay the BID levy, which is used to fund additional services in the area.

From the evidence received from stakeholders, the Committee acknowledges the benefits that the Bill will bring to businesses here. It will bring them together to work collectively on a vision. It is hoped that a BID will increase footfall and promote towns and city centres. It will create a partnership between local businesses and local councils. Most importantly, it will help to generate income.

The Committee recognises that there will be challenges, and raised concerns. As was mentioned, during the Consideration Stage, the Committee raised questions about the compulsory levies on businesses, especially given the financial pressures that businesses are under. We also recognise that exemptions and lower levies can be included within a BID proposal; for example, for charity shops, although that is down to the BID proposers.

The Committee also questioned the value of making BIDs a mandatory arrangement and recognises that, where businesses currently pool resources to help to develop a common area or project on a voluntary basis, there is a potential for businesses that do not contribute also to benefit. The Committee also recognises that, although there are concerns about the mandatory nature of the BID, the decision to take the BID forward will be made on a democratic basis.

Looking ahead, the Committee would like the Minister to explore a fund similar to that in GB for business improvement districts to help town centres to access loans for their set-up costs. The Committee acknowledges that, although the Bill makes provision for local councils to make contributions to enable the projects identified in the BID to be carried out, it does not see why the Minister for Social Development, perhaps in conjunction with his colleague at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, cannot establish a similar fund. The Committee looks forward to exploring that with his officials.

I thank the members of the Committee for their contributions to the debate in Committee and in the Assembly. I also thank the witnesses who provided written and oral submissions and the departmental officials who provided responses to members' queries. Finally, I thank the Committee staff, who facilitated the Committee Stage of the Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome that fact that we are now at the Final Stage of the Business Improvement Districts Bill, which, of course, could be of huge benefit to many small retailers. It is hoped that it will improve the commercial environment in our town centres, and I look forward to its roll-out in our local council areas.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for bringing the Final Stage of the BIDs Bill to the Assembly. Like the Deputy Chair, I thank all the staff.

We welcome the passage of this legislation, which has been universally welcomed across the business sector as something that will assist it at this difficult time. I have been convinced that reservations that I expressed at earlier stages of the Bill and in Committee can and will be addressed. However, I re-emphasise my belief that, if the benefit of this legislation is to be maximised, there must be government subvention and investment at the very least in its embryonic stages. That is an opinion shared by the Deputy Chair of the Committee, but we welcome the legislation.

Mr Lunn: I am standing in for Judith Cochrane, so I have very little to say about this except that we certainly welcome the Final Stage of the Bill. It is not something that I have been close to, but I had the opportunity some years ago when I was involved with the Lisburn historic quarter partnership to look at the possibility of a voluntary BIDs arrangement. I think it was around the time when the Blair Government were in the early stages of setting up what is now law.

In less stressful economic times, it would certainly be a very good string to the bow of local communities that want to improve their district. There is no fault in it. It may be a bit of a hard sell just at the present time, but time will tell. Other Members mentioned council contributions and, perhaps, a contribution from the Department. To make it attractive, that is probably vital. Who wants to have a levy on the rates if there is not some other contribution as well? This is good legislation. I hope that it works, and we welcome it today.

Mr McCausland: I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. I assure them that, as we take this on, there will be full consultation on the regulations in due course.

A number of contributors pointed out that there should be some sort of arrangement to include start-up funding in support of a BID. I previously committed to examining support arrangements in other jurisdictions before making a decision on that. I am considering options at the moment for providing support to businesses and councils in setting up BIDs in Northern Ireland, and I will make an announcement on that in due course.

I am grateful to Members for their constructive input as the Bill has progressed and for the high level of consensus that it has enjoyed. The Bill is a framework that will provide further subordinate legislation to support BIDs and provide the detail. The Assembly will again have the opportunity to consider BIDs when the regulations have been drafted in due course.

I conclude by asking the Assembly to pass the BIDs Bill and allow it to move forward to gain Royal Assent.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Business Improvement Districts Bill [NIA Bill 9/11-15] do now pass.

Energy Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 29 November 2012, dealing with electricity market reform.*

We are here today to consider the issue of extending primary legislative powers for electricity market reform (EMR) to Northern Ireland. These powers will help to ensure that, in the longer term, low-carbon generation can compete fairly on cost with fossil fuels without financial support and deliver the best deal for the consumer. Electricity market reform works with the market and encourages competition, minimising cost to consumers, to deliver the investment we need. I believe that these measures will ensure that Northern Ireland remains a leading destination for investment in low-carbon electricity, thereby boosting our economy by generating skills and expertise and creating jobs in the sector.

The consent of the Assembly has been sought for provisions relating to matters devolved to Northern Ireland. The provisions under consideration relate to the following: the introduction of a feed-in tariff, with contracts for difference for large-scale renewable electricity generation; the closure of the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) to new generation from 1 April 2017; the introduction of an emissions performance standard (EPS) for a new coal fuel-fired plant; and a new UK-wide institutional framework to administer the contracts for difference.

A key factor in the success of the NIRO to date is the fact that it was working within a UK-wide context. Therefore, the costs of administration and incentivising the NIRO are spread across all UK consumers, which offers the best value-for-money solution for Northern Ireland.

Contracts for difference will be available to Northern Ireland generators for projects commissioning from 2016, but, crucially, the costs will continue to be socialised across all UK consumers. Importantly, the Energy Bill retains my right to set a different strike price for Northern Ireland generators where there is clear evidence that that is required.

Although the NIRO closes to new generation from April 2017, projects already supported under the NIRO will continue to receive support.

The emissions performance standard provides a regulatory backstop on the amount of emissions that new coal-fired power stations are allowed to emit. Although this will apply across the UK, the Bill contains a provision giving me the power to suspend the EPS in Northern Ireland where there is a potential risk to security of supply.

The right institutional framework is crucial to ensuring that EMR drives investment in low-carbon generation and security of supply at an affordable cost to consumers. I am proposing that Northern Ireland is part of the UK-wide institutional framework that has a clear split of responsibilities between government, the devolved Administrations and the delivery body.

As Members can see, my Department has worked closely with the Department of Energy and Climate Change to ensure that Northern Ireland's position is recognised and respected. The powers are required now as a signal to investors as they make long-term investment decisions. The Executive are in agreement with that course of action. If this opportunity is missed, there will be a significant implication for the deployment of low-carbon generation in Northern Ireland. I am confident that by supporting electricity market reform, there will be positive opportunities for Northern Ireland to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels, to cut carbon emissions, to promote investment and to support job creation. Passing this legislative consent motion is an important step in the process.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as an Bhille a thabhairt os ar gcomhair. My thanks to the Minister for bringing Part 1 of the Energy Bill before us today. The Committee has given considerable consideration to the policy proposals, which have resulted in this motion. At its meeting on 24 November 2011, the Committee considered a written briefing from the Department, which included developments with the coalition Government's White Paper on planning our electric future. The written briefing outlined the Department's position on the policy proposals now included in the LCM.

On 16 January 2012, the Minister wrote to inform the Committee that a study had been undertaken on behalf of the Department and the Utility Regulator's office to analyse the impact of EMR on incentivising renewable electricity in the North. The Committee received oral briefings from economist John Simpson on 9 February 2012 and the Utility Regulator on 12 March 2012 to assist in clarifying some of the technical details and on the impact of the possible future adoption of a FIT with CFD. As a result of the briefing from Mr Simpson, the Committee had a number of questions for the Utility Regulator and the Department. Responses to those questions have been provided to Members, along with the Committee's report.

On 15 May 2012, the Minister wrote to confirm to the Committee that, subject to an LCM, the Westminster Energy Bill would extend to Northern Ireland for the purposes listed in the legislative consent memorandum. The Minister informed the Committee that she would seek the establishment of a single administration system across the UK for the FIT CFD as only 10 to 15 contracts would be expected in Northern Ireland annually. Members subsequently received an oral briefing from the Department on electricity market reform at its meeting on 14 June 2012. At its meeting on 15 November 2012, the Committee received a further oral briefing from the Department as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny of its plans to introduce an Energy Bill to Northern Ireland to cover provisions for, among other things, the development of an energy efficiency obligation, a small-scale FIT CFD and a higher priority to be given to sustainability in the statutory duties of the Department and the Utility Regulator. Members noted that respondents to the consultation had agreed that a small-scale FIT would be an appropriate means of incentivising small-scale renewable installations.

The Committee carefully considered the proposals in the LCM and is of the view that this legislative consent motion,

coupled with the forthcoming Northern Ireland Energy Bill, is the most appropriate means of extending to Northern Ireland the statutory framework and enabling powers for the electricity market reform programme to encourage low-carbon electricity generation for ensuring security of supply. The Committee, therefore, supports DETI in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the legislative consent motion.

Mr Newton: By and large, I concur with the remarks of the Chair of the Committee and recognise the importance of this legislation to Northern Ireland. In fact, it is right to say that the Committee recognised that, in order to improve security of supply in the longer term, low-carbon generation needed to compete fairly on a cost basis and on a level playing field. I welcome the work that has been done by the Minister and her officials at Whitehall and the fact that the costs of contracts for different CFDs will be socialised across the UK, as the Minister pointed out, and as happens with the Northern Ireland renewables obligation. Indeed, an incentive mechanism that is funded only by Northern Ireland consumers would not have allowed us to reach by 2020 our targets that were established under the Programme for Government.

The Committee is aware of the work that has been undertaken by the Department of Energy and Climate Change in London, by the Utility Regulator, as the Chairman mentioned, and by the system operator to ensure that CFDs work for Northern Ireland generation. It is important that we maintain investor confidence in Northern Ireland while keeping the cost to the consumer as low as possible. I welcome the legislative consent motion.

5.30 pm

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I concur with the Member who spoke previously, who concurred with the Chair of the Committee. However, I will have to check Hansard to see what kind of adjective Mr McGlone used to describe John Simpson.

The legislative consent motion is, in the round, very welcome. It will greatly incentivise the generation of low-carbon electricity and is aimed at better enabling us to achieve the targets that are outlined in the strategic energy framework. It is also very welcome in the sense that concessions have been secured to ensure that electricity generators that are based in the North will not be negatively impacted in the single electricity market as a result of the proposals' outworkings. That was one of the concerns that many of us had in the early stages of the process, so I congratulate the Minister and all those who were involved in the negotiations behind the scenes to achieve that result. I also thank all those who advised the Committee throughout the process and kept us on what may have been the right track.

All of us well understand the need to move to a low-carbon future. Indeed, a motion that the Alliance Party tabled that sought the development of a long-term energy strategy for our future was discussed in November last year and received unanimous support. I am alarmed at the definition that the British Government use in the Bill to determine low-carbon electricity generation. According to the Bill, low-carbon electricity generation is electricity generation:

> *"which in the opinion of the Secretary of State will contribute to a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases".*

I have seen that type of wording before. It has been used as a cover for natural gas to generate heat or power and is then put forward as some form of low-carbon technology. Natural gas is not an alternative to fossil fuels. It is not a low-carbon energy source. It is a carbon-intensive fuel, and any efforts to promote it as anything else are utterly pointless. If the objective is to reduce carbon emissions, the solution is not to consume more gas. Compared with coal, gas produces fewer carbon emissions. However, it is still much greater than other forms of electricity. The only solution is to move away from fossil fuels and on to greater renewable forms of energy. That is why the Bill is needed. Presently, the cheapest forms of electricity generation are the most polluting and the main source of our climate change emissions. Without government interventions to ensure the facilitation of more renewables, we will end up with not just higher bills as a result of rising gas and oil prices but ever-rising carbon emissions.

A number of concerned individuals and groups in Britain have raised serious concerns about the implications of the Energy Bill, which was recently passed there. The need for an energy Bill that is tailored to meet our unique circumstances has been outlined. Thankfully, that Bill will follow from this legislative consent motion at a later stage. I welcome the Minister's announcement today that she has secured Executive support to bring forward that energy Bill.

Some renewables companies have said that they would prefer if the existing system of subsidies that supports domestic renewables were made available to large-scale installations such as wind farms. Concerns have also been raised about a potential fall in investment as the subsidy switch-over kicks in, which the Minister referred to. New renewables installations, such as offshore wind farms, will continue to qualify for the current system — the renewables obligation — by which renewables generators receive certificates that they will sell in addition to the power if they come on stream by 2017. Their subsidies under that scheme will continue until 2037. The first new contracts should be ready to come into force by 2017, so, in theory, there should be no gap. Under the reforms, however, generators must apply for contracts for difference before turbines are built. That can take several years in the case of large offshore wind farms, which means that developers must begin to apply under the new system soon, at the risk that they would have been better off under the current system. I would like to hear from the Minister what action has been taken to address those concerns and how we can expect them to be resolved in the coming period.

I know that I have focused much of my remarks on potential concerns about the Bill, but other Members and the Minister have outlined a clear rationale for the benefits of the proposal and the clear need for it. I am still content to support it.

Mrs Foster: I thank everybody who spoke and who supported the motion. I thank my Executive colleagues, the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Business Committee for allowing this matter to be considered in such a timely fashion and for allowing the motion to be debated today.

I want to answer a few points that Members made. Mr Newton referred to the socialisation of the incentive across the UK. That is a critical issue and one that we spent some time on in the Department. If we had been pushed back to an incentive that applied just to Northern Ireland consumers, it would have been very difficult to reach the level that we have been able to attain in this Bill. Therefore, I want to acknowledge the work of my officials with Department of Energy and Climate Change officials in securing that socialisation across the UK. I also want to acknowledge the fact that I have retained the rights in relation to the strike price. That was something that we negotiated as well.

To pick up on Mr Flanagan's point about the definition of "low-carbon generation", it is referred to as renewables, nuclear and gas in the Bill. Natural gas is needed to manage the intermittency of wind, particularly in Northern Ireland, where we do not have nuclear power stations. We need that fast-start gas plant for when the wind does not blow. I ask the Member to acknowledge that, and the fact that his party has supported the gas line to the west. I want to see that developed as quickly as possible, particularly for businesses along that line, including agrifood businesses, and, indeed, Quinn Glass in our constituency of County Fermanagh, which is very much looking forward to having access to natural gas to give it an edge against its competitors. We need to acknowledge that natural gas plays a fundamental role in the energy market in Northern Ireland, and we will discuss that in the context of the Energy Bill when it comes to the Floor of the House, which I hope will be soon.

I believe that EMR will help to attract private sector investment now and will therefore deliver growth and jobs for the economy. In addition, I believe that providing clarity now on support for low-carbon generation will help to contribute to meeting our target of 40% renewable electricity by 2020.

Secondary legislation will be forthcoming to allow the EMR provisions to come fully into force in Northern Ireland. However, the Assembly must support the need to give developers the confidence and assurance to continue to invest in our growing renewables industry and help protect the Northern Ireland consumer from rising energy prices. I commend the motion to the Assembly, and I thank Members for their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 29 November 2012, dealing with electricity market reform.

Adjourned at 5.39 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 12 February 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. In the week that the horse meat crisis has been raging and there has been great public unease and a great adverse impact on our prime agricultural industry, why has there not been a single statement to the House on that issue from any relevant Minister? What will be done to address that deficit?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As you know, the Executive decide which Ministers give statements to the House. It is not the Speaker's role to direct that.

Ministerial Statements

Door-2-Door Transport

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement on my plans for the urban Door-2-Door scheme.

The urban Door-2-Door scheme is part of the Department's transport programme for people with disabilities. It was first introduced in 1990, and the Door-2-Door element of the programme, which initially operated only in Belfast, was extended across Northern Ireland in 2006 to towns and cities with a population of 10,000 or more, following an independent review of the programme. The aim of the service is to target social exclusion and to provide an urban-based transport service for elderly and disabled people who find it difficult to use mainstream public transport. In 2011-12, over 148,000 passenger trips were undertaken by members of our Door-2-Door service.

In 2006, the Department entered into a contract with Chambers Coach Hire Ltd to provide Door-2-Door transport services in 27 urban areas across Northern Ireland to elderly and disabled people who are members of the scheme. In 2008, the Department entered into further contracts with Disability Action and Bridge Accessible Transport for the delivery of Door-2-Door transport services in Belfast and Londonderry respectively. In late 2010, Chambers Coach Hire experienced financial difficulties that led to the creation of Moneymore Coaches (In Administration) Limited, which took over the contract previously operated by Chambers. This was effectively a single tender action by the Department.

The contracts with Moneymore Coaches (In Administration) and Disability Action were due to expire on 24 May 2011, and the Department, with the assistance of the Department of Finance and Personnel's Central Procurement Directorate, carried out a tender exercise to appoint new operators for the services in all areas except for Londonderry, where the contract was not due to expire until September 2011. Preferred bidders were identified through the procurement exercise, and that was communicated in April 2011. However, subsequent legal action resulted in a ruling on 28 February 2012 in favour of the plaintiff, requiring the Department to re-procure the service or withdraw it.

To ensure a continuity of service provision to members while consideration was given to last February's ruling, and to ensure a continuity of service while we reviewed our policy on the provision of Door-2-Door services,

the Department has awarded three single tender action contract extensions: to Disability Action to provide services in Belfast; to Bridge Accessible Transport to provide services in Londonderry; and to Moneymore Coaches (In Administration) to provide the services in 27 towns across Northern Ireland. These extensions are due to expire on 31 March 2013.

Work has been completed on reviewing the policy for the Door-2-Door scheme, and a consultation exercise commenced on 22 October 2012. That ended on 14 January 2013, and responses are currently being analysed and assessed. The position on single tender actions means that we now need to address the procurement issue. In the light of the court decision, when we go to the market, it is important that we do so in a way that our specification is clear and concise. We are working closely with colleagues from Central Procurement Directorate and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment on developing procurement proposals.

It is clear that some time will be required beyond 31 March 2013 to agree these new ideas, test them and then go to the market with a realistic, value-for-money and workable specification. In the interim, only two options are available for the existing contract extensions: extend the single awards for a further period using the existing providers; or terminate the contracts for all areas until our considerations are complete and a new procurement is finalised.

'Procurement Guidance Note 02/10' gives details on the single tender award process and of the consequences of improper use of single tender awards. Although we are satisfied that the current awards meet this guidance, the single tender award for Moneymore Coaches (In Administration) Limited has effectively been in place since October 2010, that for Disability Action has been in place since May 2011 and that for Bridge Accessible Transport has been in place since September 2012. Since, as I said earlier, it is clear that some time will be required beyond 31 March 2013 to agree new ideas, test them and then go to the market with a realistic, value-for-money and workable specification, I do not believe it is appropriate to continue to extend the existing single tender awards.

Terminating the contracts for all areas until such times as our considerations are complete and a new procurement is finalised draws a line under the current scheme. It fits readily with the consultation exercise that ended on 14 January, meaning that we will be clearer on the membership criteria, given the changes to the benefit system that will see the introduction of the new personal independence payment. Termination will also allow us more time to update our database and to redesign and arrange printing of new application forms and supporting literature for members, given the possible changes to eligibility criteria and to the passporting benefits.

Given the advantages of this option, I have decided that my Department will end the existing contracts with Bridge Accessible Transport, Disability Action and Moneymore Coaches (In Administration) when the current extensions run out on 31 March 2013. My staff will advise the three organisations of my decision today.

It is obviously important that the up to 2,200 current regular users of the Door-2-Door service are not left without any service for a period. Therefore, although the current Door-2-Door service will end when the current extensions run out on 31 March 2013, I have decided that, to meet the needs of existing users, we will put in place an interim service managed by Disability Action from 1 April 2013. Transport services will be provided or organised by Disability Action and they are likely to draw upon some or all of the rural transport partnerships, other voluntary organisations and, if necessary, other service providers.

Rural community transport partnerships were established in rural areas to help meet the transport needs for members who live in rurally isolated areas and who, due to reduced mobility, cannot access mainstream public transport. The services are a combination of demand-responsive transport for individual members through the Dial-a-Lift scheme and the provision of group transport to organisations that are also members of the partnerships.

The partnerships provide services in some 98% of rural Northern Ireland across seven operational areas. Each partnership is an independent company with its own board of directors. They are charitable organisations and operate on a not-for-profit basis. The partnerships have stimulated the development of community transport provision and make a valuable contribution to public transport accessibility. In 2011-12, the partnerships carried out more than 684,000 passenger trips. I believe that many, if not all, of the partnerships are well placed to assist with the interim service where Disability Action believes that it is appropriate. Existing members of the Door-2-Door schemes may be able to become members of rural transport partnerships and receive services in that way if the partnerships consider that appropriate.

My officials are working with Disability Action and other stakeholders to ensure that the interim service will be fully operational before the Easter break, and scheme members will be kept fully informed of the changes being implemented. The first letter to scheme members is issuing today. It is important to clarify that scheme members will be fully informed of the changes and that the letters are issuing to scheme members, not Members of the House.

The principles of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) are also being applied to avoid creating unnecessary worry and stress for the existing hard-working staff delivering the Door-2-Door services. From today, steps will be taken to engage with employers and staff to effect transfers quickly and painlessly. In parallel, my officials have set up a project team to move forward the procurement of Door-2-Door services in the future. It is our intention to commence pilot operations later this year and to evaluate the effectiveness of those pilots after a year of operation. Thereafter, we plan to tender for the provision of services that will best meet the needs of our intended service users.

I will finish by making it clear there is absolutely no question of a reduction in budget for the services in the interim or going forward. I commend the statement to the House.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we begin questions, I remind Members that questions are on the statement about the Door-2-Door service.

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that he emphasises that strong procurement

procedures will be followed, particularly in light of the recently published audit report. Is the Minister content that clients of the service will not be inconvenienced by the interim arrangements, and will he indicate whether he will consider extending the service to include other socially excluded categories, such as young people and the unemployed?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development for his question and for his broad support for the measures that I have introduced today.

The bottom line, and it is very important, is that there is no reduction in the budget allocated to this. The resources are being maintained. I hope that, as a result of the changes that I am announcing today, the service can even be improved. I hope that, for those who avail themselves of this important service, there will be little or no disruption to their lives. They will still be able to make contact on the same telephone numbers to arrange available transport. Therefore, this service regulates the current situation, and I hope that, as we go into the future, we can look positively at how we can improve it further.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will the Minister detail why he has chosen Disability Action to deliver the service and not any of the other organisations or, indeed, the Community Transport Association?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. Of course, he, like most Members, will have a high regard for Disability Action as an organisation and for its capacity to provide a service. It is a voluntary and a community organisation that has been providing services for disabled people in Northern Ireland for a very long time, predating the Door-2-Door scheme. It is clear to me that its ethos of putting the needs of disabled people to the forefront of its business, and its experience in providing services and dealing with Departments, makes it the organisation best placed to seek co-operation from others. It understands disabled people's transport needs in particular and knows how to make the interim service work.

10.45 am

Before further procurement can be finalised, temporary arrangements with established voluntary and community organisations is the best option.

Mr Hussey: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. I am pleased to hear him make it clear that there will be no cut whatsoever in the funding for that important service, which, I believe, currently costs in the region of £3 million.

He made a brief reference to telephone numbers. Will he explain how current users will receive telephone contact details for the interim service?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his support for today's announcement. It is important that there be as little disruption to the users as possible. With that in mind, arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the telephone numbers that customers currently use to contact their provider will not change, which will allow them to continue to avail of that important service.

That will give some comfort and minimise any disruption or inconvenience that may be felt. I am confident that Disability Action will be able to deal effectively with the transition. Understandably, there may be teething problems, but I hope that, with the same telephone numbers in place, the users, who are the important people in the process, will feel able to make the necessary arrangements for their transport.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement and the energy that he brings to his Department. In the penultimate paragraph, he mentions future pilot schemes. Does he agree that Door-2-Door Transport will become meaningful only when we have proper integrated transport systems, similar to those developed in Britain and the Republic of Ireland? Will he assure the House that before he finishes his term as Minister we will have a scheme up and running?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his always flattering approach.

Mr A Maginness: Fawning.

Mr Kennedy: Yes. I understand his point, which is important. He will know that we are putting a rural transport pilot scheme in place in Dungannon and Cookstown. The link to Door-2-Door is there, but it is not yet complete. We will continue to explore ways in which to bring forward schemes that best suit the needs of the entire community, rural and urban.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his helpful statement. I particularly welcome the pilot projects that he intends to undertake. Will the pilot providers be able to participate in any future tendering process, given the Department of the Environment's (DOE) plans for driver licensing?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. The arrangements that I have announced today are for the interim while we prepare for the new scheme. The new scheme will have to be piloted and tested, and I hope that the operators will have an opportunity to tender.

I will have close discussions with DOE about licensing arrangements. The Member's point is well made, and we will make sure that we are aware of it as we go forward.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement. Can the Minister reassure me that the Door-2-Door scheme in my own constituency of North Down will not suffer as a result of this change? Can he assure me that Disability Action will be able to take on the workload from Moneymore Coaches and Bridge Accessible Transport? Can he also enlighten the House on how the procurement process went so wrong that Moneymore Coaches was able to overturn the decision in court? What was the cost of that to the Department?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for what I think is his support of the measure that I am bringing forward. I was not quite clear about that.

Rather than dwelling on past experiences, I want to take forward the Door-2-Door service: a service whereby people avail themselves of transport facilities to help them in their daily lives. As the Member rightly said, the service is widely used in the north Down area. I am aware of his interest in the Door-2-Door scheme. We are, obviously, entering a period of transition from the old arrangements, ending the single tender actions and giving Disability Action the opportunity to provide this service.

I am confident that Disability Action will do a very good job. Its reputation goes before it. I would be concerned if any Member thought that Disability Action was somehow not

capable of providing an efficient and effective service. Yes; there will be teething and transitional problems initially. However, Disability Action and my Department will seek to work through those problems as quickly as possible. We are attempting to ease those as much as possible. The fact that the same telephone numbers are to be used for people to avail themselves of the service is an important benefit.

I very much hope that the service will continue and go forward. It is absolutely crucial to underline the fact that we are still putting in the same resource. This is not a cut. It is not, as some people predicted, a case of trying to save money. It is about a more effective and efficient service as we go forward and begin to plan for the more permanent arrangements that need to be put in place.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Can the Minister confirm to the House that the period from the termination of the contracts until the introduction of the full scheme will be as brief as possible to give advantage to the other members?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. It is important that the transition is as seamless as possible, and that is obviously my intention. The current arrangements, which run until the end of March, will continue to be delivered by the current operators. Thereafter, Disability Action, in conjunction with the other providers, will take on the service. I very much hope that it will be seamless and that people will not encounter any serious or significant difficulty in availing themselves of these very necessary services.

Mr G Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Does the Minister foresee any service or job losses as a result of his announcement? Will he do everything that he can to maintain the current level of service in both areas?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. He raises the very important point of how staff involved in the current operation will fare. We very much want to protect them and encourage the protection of their terms and conditions. We envisage that the new provider, Disability Action, will need to avail itself of the services of drivers and associated staff. We will co-operate with staff fully to ensure that that happens as seamlessly and effortlessly as possible.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement. The Minister knows that I have a long-standing interest in this area. He referred to TUPE. Can he assure me that clients will see pretty much the same faces behind the wheel so that there is no change for them and no disruption in the way that the system operates for clients and drivers?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, I pay tribute to him for his interest in this particular issue, on which he has made long-standing representations on a constituency basis and otherwise.

It is my strong sense that the same drivers and the same people will be involved in providing these important services. I pay tribute to the drivers and to the staff who have provided the services over the years and will hopefully continue to do so. I very much expect that there will be little or no change in many of the personnel involved in this service.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, I thank you for your statement. The Door-2-Door Transport service continued the practice of taking people to hospital appointments while, in my area and other areas like mine, rural transport was stopped from doing that. Will the new arrangement you have set up carry on the practice of taking people to hospital appointments? Will you look at reinstating that service in rural areas where you have withdrawn it?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. It is important to stress that the Door-2-Door Transport service was never envisaged as being purely a health service transport service. It is important that we realise that it provides a service to members of the community with particular access needs for a range of activities.

I am aware of the issue that he raises on a continual basis. Of course, as we move forward to prepare for the more permanent arrangements, I will look again at that. The initial rationale behind Door-2-Door Transport was not to provide simply a health service transport service. It is more than that, it needs to be more than that and it is important that it continues to be more than that.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he confirm that, under the new delivery of the scheme, there will be no difference in the cost to the service user? Furthermore, what account will the review that is being analysed in relation to the transport provision take of the interdepartmental working group that is looking at health and education transport provision? Is there any scope in that review for providing a much more effective and cost-efficient service?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. Indeed, she makes a very good suggestion. Of course we are already aware of that interdepartmental review, which will, and should, feed into any pilot scheme that we come up with or any new proposal for the permanent arrangements that need to be put in place.

Certainly, as I have clearly indicated today, there is no reduction in the budget for the service. I want to stress and reiterate that. This has the potential to improve the service for the people who use it and perhaps to add to the numbers who use it. I hope that those are the positive outcomes of the announcement today.

Mr Storey: As someone who used public transport this morning to travel to the House, I would not be as commending as the Member for East Londonderry Mr Dallat about the Minister and his operations. The train was excellent, but the bus was atrocious, because I arrived here late.

However, moving on to his statement, is the Minister aware that, under the current regulations, organisations such as the rural community transport partnerships are unable to apply for contracts? That has inhibited them, as partnerships, from growing. Will he look at every possible means of expanding the rural community transport provision and providers to include organisations such as North Coast Community Transport, which provides an invaluable service to my constituency?

11.00 am

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I am genuinely sorry for his transport difficulties this morning,

although he is someone who I think missed the bus a long time ago. *[Laughter.]* He makes a good point, and, as we go forward, we will give consideration to how the overall service can best provide rural and urban transport.

Mr P Ramsey: Minister, I am chair of the all-party group on disability, and a number of your colleagues are on that group. You will be aware that this issue is regularly on the agenda. I strongly welcome the statement, particularly in the context of Disability Action taking on the additional work, which it has the capacity to do. Can the Minister assure the House and all those with disabilities across Northern Ireland that a consistent service will be available to all existing users?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member, and I pay tribute to his long-standing interest in the issue. In bringing forward the changes, we do so with the intention that the maximum level of service cannot only be maintained but improved. That is what we seek and what we are about. That is why there is no cut in the budget for this and why we believe it to be an important resource. I very much hope that Disability Action and the operators will have success in not only maintaining services but improving them.

Mr Allister: Is the Minister, in his statement, really announcing a soft landing to end a separate urban door-to-door scheme and bring about its fusion into the rural scheme? Is that really what he is saying? Given the role of Disability Action, has it been engaged on foot of a single tender action?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his question. I have a sense that the Member sees conspiracy in almost every statement, but perhaps that is being overly cynical.

The situation needed to be addressed because the time period for the single tender was to expire at the end of March. It was sensible to review the situation and see how it could work more effectively and efficiently. That is why we have come up with the proposal. Disability Action will now be the main contractor.

It is an interim solution, and it is my intention and that of the Department to use pilot schemes to bring forward a more permanent and equally a more effective and efficient scheme. This interim measure is because of the very real time pressure and deadlines of the end of March. Decisions had to be taken, and the decision that I outlined today is in the best interests of Door-2-Door Transport and community transport generally.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to outline to the Assembly the Executive's decisions for the future of the means-tested education maintenance allowance (EMA).

The EMA scheme was jointly introduced in September 2004 by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE). The main purpose of the scheme is to encourage young people from lower-income backgrounds to remain in post-compulsory education at school or college. EMA supports key Programme for Government priorities to close the gap in educational underachievement between those who are least and most disadvantaged and improve the participation of young people in education. At present, it consists of weekly payments of £30, £20 or £10 depending on household income and bonus payments totalling £300 per annum.

Findings from a recent joint review of EMA had highlighted that the scheme was not as effectively targeted as it could be. Over 60% of students who received EMA indicated that they would have remained in education even if they had not received it. On the other hand, the review identified cases where EMA had made a real difference for retention.

It is important to say that, from the outset, both I and the Minister of Education were committed to the retention of the EMA and were determined that young people from lower-income families would continue to be assisted to stay in education and training. Nevertheless, good governance meant that we had to address the issue concerning how effectively the current scheme was targeted.

At the Executive meeting on 5 July 2012, it was agreed that a public consultation and associated equality impact assessment on the future of the EMA scheme should be undertaken with a view to implementing any agreed changes from the academic year 2013-14. On 30 July 2012, the public consultation was launched, and it ran for 14 weeks until 2 November. It contained five options for the future structure of EMA that had been considered and costed in light of the need to better target the scheme and to find certain financial savings.

A number of key findings emerged from the review and consultation. The majority of respondents wanted EMA retained in some form and were in favour of a single payment of £30 a week. The current bonus awards of £300 per annum — agreed through the learning agreements that learners sign each year — are recognised by a substantial proportion of stakeholders as improving completion of coursework, timekeeping and behaviour, although these outcomes are not the primary objectives of the scheme. Although a substantial proportion of stakeholders supported the retention of the bonus payments, the majority of respondents agreed that the £300 annual bonus payments ought to be reduced.

A number of options included in the consultation document considered a household income threshold of £16,190 in line with the free school meals criteria. However, it was noted that this threshold was much lower than the current EMA threshold of £22,930 and the EMA thresholds in Scotland and Wales, and it was concluded that a threshold at this level would exclude too many disadvantaged families and young people from the scheme. A number

of respondents to the consultation, including the National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI), suggested the addition of a second household income threshold for families with more than one dependent child, in line with the Scottish and Welsh EMA schemes.

I can now advise the Assembly that, taking these various factors into account, the Executive have agreed that the scheme should be better targeted to more effectively support families most in need. To that end, they have determined that the £20 and £10 bands should be withdrawn and be replaced by a single band of £30 a week, payable to children from households with income of £20,500 or less with one dependent child, or £22,500 or less where there are two or more dependent children. The implementation of these changes will result in a 21% improvement of targeting, based on the numbers forecast to be eligible for the scheme in 2014-15, and a 10% improvement on current numbers.

The Executive also considered whether the bonus payments should continue to be payable under the scheme. They noted that around 60% of EMA co-ordinators in the learning centres saw considerable value in the bonuses. They believed that bonuses made a difference to behaviour, timekeeping and completion of coursework and that the removal of the bonuses could potentially have a negative impact on the motivation and performance of learners and could result in an impact on the participation of older learners and, in turn, on retention rates of the scheme.

The responses to the public consultation on the future of EMA demonstrated that there was support for the retention of bonus payments, with almost 70% of respondents stating that bonus payments of at least £100 per annum should be retained. The Education Minister, in particular, is also very keen to retain bonuses as part of the scheme, given the important contribution that bonuses have made in incentivising young people to attend school or college and complete the necessary coursework.

Consequently, the Executive have concluded that bonuses should be retained in the scheme, albeit in a modified form, to ensure successful delivery of the core objectives of the scheme and the wider Executive priorities for tackling disadvantage as articulated in the Programme for Government, including closing the gap in educational achievement and participation rates.

The Executive have, therefore, agreed to continue to include a bonus element in the scheme comprising a £200 annual bonus payable in two tranches. This represents a reduction of £100 in the current £300 annual bonus. I emphasise that no bonuses are payable in similar schemes in Great Britain, so, once again, the Executive have developed a solution to address the differing needs of the population here compared with elsewhere.

The new scheme, excluding bonus payments, will produce savings sufficient to meet the target set by the Executive. The bonus payments are largely being met by a transfer of resources from the Department of Education, with a smaller contribution from my Department. Although the budget and responsibility for the implementation of EMA rest with my Department, it is a cross-cutting issue with the Department of Education, and I am pleased to have reached a very satisfactory conclusion with the Education Minister. I am also grateful for the support of the Executive, and especially the assistance of the Finance Minister, in reaching this conclusion.

That decision now represents an appropriately targeted and financially sustainable way forward on education maintenance allowance, and I commend it to the House.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I received a briefing from the Minister earlier this morning about this statement, and I conveyed to him then, as I convey to him now, that I am disappointed to have received the statement in this manner. The Committee can find no record that it received a summary of responses to the consultation, as is normal practice. I am quite sure that the Committee would have wanted to talk about this matter in some detail. It is certainly a matter of public interest, and I am, frankly, shocked that it should be brought to the Assembly as a fait accompli.

There are significant questions that we want to ask, which the format of this debate does not permit. However, I have a specific question. The Minister says:

> *"The implementation of these changes will result in a 21% improvement of targeting".*

What does that mean exactly? Does it mean that 21% fewer people will receive EMA support, or how has he arrived at those figures?

When I look at the impact of the changes in the threshold, I find that this will affect hard-pressed families in Northern Ireland. I would like the Minister to tell us how many children and parents will be affected. What saving, because this appears to be a cost-saving exercise, does he seek to make from that?

I conclude by saying to the Minister that this is not the appropriate way to go about making major changes that have financial implications for the people of Northern Ireland. The Committee should have been properly consulted. Had it been, it would have consulted properly and engaged with the Department. I suspect that Committee members present will be extremely disappointed in the way that this has been handled.

Dr Farry: The Chair of the Committee has made a number of points, and I will try to respond to all of them. First, he spoke of procedures. This is an Executive decision that was taken last week at the Executive meeting and which we are reporting to the House today. As such, this is the first opportunity that we have had to report on the Executive's decision. It is appropriate that I come to the Assembly to make this announcement, and we are happy to be here and answer questions on the issue.

The issue is a joint one between my Department and the Department of Education, and we have to formulate a joint position for the two Departments taking the issue forward, in addition to formulating a common position for the Executive. A public consultation ran for 14 weeks in 2012. At no stage did the Committee express any view on that consultation or seek to give its views to the Department.

The Chair of the Committee is probably the last person in the Chamber who wishes to take direction from anyone, least of all those in his party. It is important to acknowledge that the Committee sets its own agenda and seeks information from the Department on issues.

11.15 am

From standing back and observing over the past 18 months, I have been amazed that some of the critically important issues on which the Department sought to engage the Committee have not been picked up by it. We have had to ask several times, although there have been other matters that the Committee has become involved with intensively. I respect its role, but it is for the Committee to set its agenda.

If the Committee wants to have a dialogue with us about setting a forward work programme, we are more than happy to do so. In that light, we are happy for officials to attend the Committee in the near future to give it a full briefing on the outworkings of the consultation and a summary of the responses received. However, I stress that that was a decision for the Executive to take, and we are reporting what was decided.

This is good news for students and young people in Northern Ireland, and we should not forget that. We are announcing a scheme for education maintenance allowance that is better than that in any other jurisdiction in the United Kingdom, and it is important that we bear that in mind. England has abolished EMA entirely and replaced it with a bursary scheme, with expenditure at a third of the previous level. Our scheme is similar to those in Scotland and Wales, but no bonus is available in those jurisdictions. We are continuing to invest in a bigger and better way than other jurisdictions.

We acknowledge that we needed to ensure that the scheme was better targeted. We have identified situations in which it has not made a difference to people's decisions to stay in education. That money could be better employed in supporting young people, as opposed to using it in ineffectively. We have now achieved better targeting of the scheme, with the money going to those who will benefit most from it.

With the additional contributions from the Department of Education, there is only a small reduction in the overall level of EMA expenditure in the Budget. However, those resources will be concentrated in fewer hands. Around a quarter of young people in Northern Ireland receive EMA, and in that quarter we will see a reduction of around 10% in the current figures. However, if we look ahead to the projection of recipients, there will be a reduction of around 21% in 2014-15. I again stress that this is an investment in young people, and it sits alongside all the other expenditure to support young people.

Mr Buchanan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I thank the Minister for bringing the statement to the House. However, I am disappointed that the Committee did not see the responses or anything else prior to it coming before the House, nor had it any opportunity to discuss it further. I listened to the Minister's criticisms, but I would have thought it good practice for the Committee to have seen the responses, as it will have a number of questions to ask when it sits again.

How many students stand to lose out because the £10 and the £20 band thresholds will be done away with?

Dr Farry: I thank the Deputy Chair for his comments. The Committee will receive a summary of the consultation responses in the very near future. We will ensure that that takes place so that the Executive's decision can be further scrutinised in Committee. However, I stress again that we are reporting an Executive decision to the Assembly.

We estimate that, for 2011-12, there were 22,367 recipients of the £30 band, 2,338 recipients of the £20 band and 1,759 recipients of the £10 band. In essence, we are removing around 4,000 from the current range of EMA recipients.

Given the current economic situation, there is obvious upward pressure on numbers receiving EMA. We project that, by 2014-15, about 26,000 people will be eligible to receive the £30 band.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Like other Members, I welcome the announcement, the agreement at Executive level and the certainty that that creates for students. I am also happy to see the Minister give some sort of acknowledgement that the five options that were put forward last July were unacceptable. That was the view of my party when we responded. However, I support the Chair's comments in respect of how this has been handled procedurally. That has been disappointing, and the fact that an urgent oral statement has been made raises questions. This is all based on a flawed review with a small percentage of respondents that was then presented as the view of the majority of the student population, which is not the case. Will the Minister outline the predicted reduction in the annual EMA budget as a result of this agreement? What efforts have been made by DEL to find those savings elsewhere in the Department? I would also like to know whether the Committee was ever made aware that NUS-USI put in an alternative proposal.

Dr Farry: In respect of the consultation being flawed, I remind Mr Flanagan that it was a joint consultation by my Department and the Department of Education. It was signed up to by two Ministers from two different political parties, and it was endorsed by the Executive. I do not think that the counterproposals from NUS-USI have been reported to the Committee because we have not yet received a summary of responses, but the Minister of Education and I have had meetings with NUS-USI and have engaged with it on its proposals. Equally, as an organisation, it has sought to engage with a wide range of MLAs. So, although that engagement may not have happened with the Committee, I would be surprised if individual Members were not aware of what NUS-USI was seeking to achieve.

In respect of the financing, there was a requirement from the Executive to find certain savings in relation to EMA. All the options in the original consultation paper were costed on that basis. We have ensured that the core of the new EMA scheme is within those parameters. When I say "the core scheme", that is minus the issue of the bonus, which is being funded by a transfer from the Department of Education to my Department's baseline that will be addressed in due course by the Finance Minister. My Department is also making a smaller contribution towards that. The EMA scheme is now financially sustainable. I want to give the message that any uncertainty around EMA is now over, and we will have something that we can stand over in the coming years.

Mrs Overend: From memory of my time on the Committee for Employment and Learning a number of months ago, I

recall that the analysis of EMA failed to accurately portray the reasons why it failed certain students. How does the Minister propose to measure its success, going forward? Can the Minister provide the exact cost to the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning and the difference in cost?

Dr Farry: We measure the success or otherwise of the scheme primarily in terms of the retention of young people in secondary education or further education. A second element is the level of achievement that those students attain due to the support that comes from EMA. There was some inefficiency in the scheme in that the majority of young people indicated that, while EMA was useful, it was not making a difference to their decision to stay in education. To an extent, that will still be with us under a revised scheme. We are not going to fully address that issue no matter how we reorientate the scheme.

The current scheme for EMA costs about £27 million per annum. The revised scheme, short of the issue of the bonus, addresses and identifies savings of about £5 million, which slightly more than meets the recurring pressure of about £4·6 million that the Executive have presented us with. The cost of the £200 bonuses will be £2·1 million in 2013-14 and a recurring cost of £4·1 million thereafter. The Department of Education is paying £1·85 million in 2013-14 and £3·6 million thereafter. My Department is paying £250,000 in 2013-14 and £500,000 recurring.

Mr P Ramsey: I, like other members of the Committee, particularly the Chair and Deputy Chair, want to express my genuine concern. This is the most important subject for families and young people across Northern Ireland. It is hugely disappointing that the Committee — a scrutiny Committee — did not have the opportunity to look at those consultations. The consultation in itself presented a bogus choice between one group and another, and that was part of our submission to the Department.

The Committee has been engaging with this subject matter since the commencement of the consultation. There are very few weeks when we are not talking around the edges of EMA, so I am surprised to hear from you even the criticism of the Committee. If you have something to say to the Committee, you should say it to the Committee and not in the House. I have to say that.

The format does not present us with an opportunity to engage effectively and properly in challenging this. For example, Minister, Include Youth continuously presented a very good case about vulnerable young people in terms of making a special case for them, as is done in Scotland, to bring them in through the EMA. What have you done in those circumstances?

Dr Farry: Mr Ramsey's comments confirm some of my ongoing frustrations with the situation. First of all, the Committee may well have had an interest in EMA but there has been nothing to stop it seeking information and updates from the Department at any stage. This has been a very live issue over the past six months and longer. We have not received correspondence or requests for information from the Committee on this issue, and we receive a lot of requests for information from the Committee on other matters on an ongoing basis.

Second of all, what we have produced is, actually, a good scheme for Northern Ireland and a better scheme than in other jurisdictions in the rest of the UK. Let us also remember that we are doing a lot of other things to invest in young people. Mr Ramsey referred to the campaign by Include Youth for a form of EMA for those who are on community and voluntary-type schemes supported by the European social fund that have been engaging with the issue of NEETs. There was a debate in the Assembly on that issue many months ago, calling on me to act in that matter. I am disappointed that I am being asked what I have done on that, having announced several months ago as part of the NEETs strategy that we have introduced a training allowance for young people who are on those schemes. So, the proposal from Include Youth has been addressed under a quicker timetable than Include Youth and other organisations asked of the Department. We have done what Mr Ramsey asked months ago, so I am at a loss as to why I have been asked today why I have not done it.

Mr P Ramsey: It is EMA I am talking about.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement and his continuing efforts to make sure that young people get the opportunity to further advance themselves. I welcome the fact that a number of students were in the Public Gallery to hear what was being said. How does the new system compare with the proposals from the National Union of Students and the Union of Students in Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr McCarthy for his comments. I stress that we have had a positive engagement with the NUS-USI. The proposals that we have outlined from the Executive are greater in terms of investment than the consultation response from the NUS/USI proposed. So, we have actually gone further as an Executive than the students asked us to in what was, I have to say, the sensible and realistic response that came from NUS-USI. We have followed through on their proposal for the retention of the £30 allowance. We have taken on board their comments about a split differential threshold for low-income households with one child versus those with two or more children. We have listened to what they had to say about the bonus and gone further than what was proposed. That is why it is important we get the message out that we have continued to invest in young people.

Mr Ramsey made some comments from a sedentary position after I had sat down. He was talking about EMA. What we have announced for young people through the NEETs projects is EMA-equivalent. We may not be branding it as EMA, but it is precisely what was asked of us by the sector by way of a training allowance.

11.30 am

Mr Ross: I share the concern of other Committee members that the Committee was not kept in the loop on this, but I will perhaps buck the trend by being a little more positive about the content of the statement. I do not think that an EMA system in which 60% of recipients of the payment would stay in education anyhow can be considered a good use of public money. Therefore, I think reforms that target the most vulnerable to ensure that they get a payment to stay in education and save the public purse money are a positive development.

I want to point out something that the Minister said in his statement. He said there was a fear that the:

"removal of ... bonuses could potentially have a negative impact on the motivation and performance of learners".

Does the Minister agree that the motivation for young people to stay in education should be to gain a good qualification to secure a job and get on in life, not, primarily, because they get paid to do so?

Dr Farry: I agree with the comments from Mr Ross on the overall design of the scheme and the rationale for students. It is important to recognise that EMA has played a positive role in supporting students from low-income households and enabling them to have the freedom to attend school or college without the same degree of financial worry. It is important to stress, of course, that EMA is not part of the formal welfare system in this country; it is an entirely different type of initiative. That has been, to some extent, the outworkings of that. At the same time, we should seek to avoid a situation where people, particularly young people, do something only because there is a financial incentive for it, whether that is to engage, through the EMA, or go on work experience when they are unemployed. Finance may well be an important consideration, but it should not be the sole consideration. The more important consideration is that young people understand the importance of education, training and work experience in building their career. It is only through upskilling and experience that young people will be competitive in an increasingly difficult and challenging labour market. I think that most young people understand that and are responding positively to the initiatives that are being put forward by my Department and others.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. I am sure that many students across the North do so too, as it brings some relief, especially considering the bonuses. This remains a vital resource for many of our young people who wish to remain in education, not the motivation for doing so in the first place. When you consider that we have been able to retain EMA and keep university fees frozen at the current level, there can be no doubt that we have the most affordable and supportive arrangements for students of anywhere else on these islands. I especially welcome the contribution from the Education Minister, John O'Dowd, on protecting the bonus payments and ultimately ensuring the success of the scheme for local students. Look at what the Tories wanted to do and have done in England and Wales: abolish the scheme entirely. In Scotland, they have not been able to retain the bonuses. So, today's statement is to be welcomed. How will the Minister monitor the outworkings of the changes to EMA so that they do not negatively impact on the core aim of the scheme?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Hazzard for his comments and the context that he has set. It is important to reflect on that for a moment. Overall, this Executive are investing and doing more for young people on a pro rata basis than any of their counterparts. Mr Hazzard referred to the freezing of tuition fees for local students at local universities. That has already made a clear difference to people choosing the option of higher education. We also have a strategy for widening participation in higher education to ensure that we have a proper, fair, balanced profile of students coming forward and encourage under-represented sections of the community in Northern Ireland to access higher education. We then have the youth employment scheme, where we also invest more on a pro rata basis than our counterparts elsewhere. From a standing start, we have now created the new budget to invest in NEETs, and a range of programmes have been launched over the past number of months as part of a new NEETs strategy. That includes a training allowance for young people who were previously on the European social fund-supported schemes. What we are doing on EMA, which is a further investment in young people, sits very well within that context. Through this, the scheme will be better targeted, so that the young people most in need of EMA support will continue to receive it, and it is not being withdrawn at all. We are well ahead of our counterparts in that regard.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Minister for his statement to the House today. I think that members of the Education Committee will certainly view with great interest the scheme as proposed. There are many elements to it. It is interesting that almost 70% of respondents stated that they wanted bonuses retained and that that is actually what the Minister has done, which he informed the House of today. I think that most Members will welcome the fact that the revised scheme does not focus all entitlement for assistance solely on students entitled to free school meals, which is an issue that the Education Committee has looked at on a number of occasions.

Given the Minister's answer to the previous question about what is being done for young people and in light of this scheme and the focus to ensure that we target our resources appropriately, does the Minister now feel that it is time to revisit with the Education Minister an issue that the Education Minister decided to put in the bin, which is a 14-19 policy? That is a key component to assisting schemes such as EMA and others that he has outlined in the House today.

Dr Farry: Again, I thank Mr Storey for his comments. I think that what he is alluding to is that what we are doing on EMA is only one part of a much bigger picture in how we support young people. It is important that we co-ordinate what happens in further education and in our secondary education system.

Yesterday, we announced the apprenticeship and youth training review, which, with respect to my Department's functions, is a further investment in young people. I remain happy to engage with the Education Minister on these issues, be it the more tight, discrete entitlement framework or a much broader 14-19 strategy. It is important that form follows function and that we ensure that we take a holistic approach to the interests of young people; that they have access to the best courses, no matter where they are provided, and the best teaching and advice, no matter where that is provided; and that we incentivise them to stay on education and engage with it.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's statement and note that he is back in the comfort zone of the Executive.

The Minister will, of course, be aware that far too many people leave school without any basic qualifications and that many of them emigrate to other countries with no skills. Does he agree that it is critical that he engage with the widest possible political spectrum when discussing the future of such people, particularly those who have been failed by the secondary system and desperately need to

stay on at school to acquire the skills that will give them the dignity of a career that they will not have with no skills at all.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Dallat for his comments. I am perfectly comfortable where I am.

First of all, it is important to recognise that the Executive have recognised the importance of upskilling across a very broad front. Certainly, within my responsibilities, we have a wide range of schemes and initiatives that seek to address those issues. I responded to Mr Storey by stressing the importance of collaboration and co-operation between my Department and the Department of Education on how we take those issues forward. Although it is not my direct responsibility to respond for the Department of Education, it is important to acknowledge that there are firm and quite challenging targets in the Programme for Government for attainment at GCSE, particularly in maths and English. It is important that we ensure that as many young people as possible are trained in the core competencies and that, in turn, we have a training system that picks up and gives fresh opportunities to young people who, unfortunately, leave school without those basic qualifications.

Mr Allister: The Minister likes to boast that he comes from a party that values, indeed exemplifies, consensus, yet, today, he has belligerently displayed a cat-and-mouse attitude with the Committee and dodged the Chairman's question, which was this: why was there no feedback to the Committee on the outcome of the consultation? He tells us today that he will provide it now, after the event, without the Committee asking him to provide it. If he can provide it so magnanimously after the event, why did he never think to provide it before the event?

Dr Farry: The tone introduced in response to my statement was not initiated by me, but, if people want to make comments and go off into procedural matters rather than focus on the substance, that is their choice, and I will respond to and address those comments. I believe that I was clear in stating the position earlier, but, for the benefit of Mr Allister, I will state it again. First, this was a matter that went before the Executive; the Executive reached a position last Thursday; and I am here to report today. I would have been here on Monday, but there were issues with the Student Loans Company and implementation that we had to address first. Secondly, this is a joint matter for my Department and the Department of Education, and it was a joint consultation by the two Departments. It is, therefore, a cross-cutting issue for the Executive and between the two Departments. I make a commitment that we will brief the Committee on the responses to the consultation as soon as we can. I am sure that Mr Storey, as Chair of the Education Committee, is equally looking forward to a similar briefing from his Minister on the issue.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the retention of the education maintenance allowance. I am well aware of the real difference that it makes to young people, students and families across Northern Ireland. Despite the political showmanship of Mr Allister, I welcome the fact that, at first glance, the new model appears to reflect quite a number of responses to the public consultation. How will the EMA link with other measures being taken to ensure that all our young people have an equal opportunity to achieve their educational potential? How will these changes be communicated to young people and families across Northern Ireland?

Dr Farry: I thank my colleague for his comments. That is another reason why it is important that we made the statement today. We have given an assurance to young people, particularly those from a low-income household, that they can have surety about the future of EMA. I appreciate that there was some concern in the wider community about the matter.

EMA is part of a much wider suite of policies that we have to support people in education. Again, I highlight what the Executive have done on tuition fees and our strategy on widening participation. All of that is about encouraging young people to stay in education, to progress in education and to consider a range of flexible pathways through which they can achieve higher skills. As we conclude the debate, it is worth stressing to the House that we need to invest in a major upskilling of the population in Northern Ireland. We know what we have to achieve by 2020 if we are to be internationally competitive, so we need to encourage more and more young people to invest in their skills and their future. Their future is our future.

11.45 am

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, to move the Consideration Stage of the Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the three clauses for the Question on stand part, followed by the long title.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Budget Bill: Second Stage

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

> *That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 18/11-15] be agreed.*

Accelerated passage of the Bill through the Assembly is necessary to ensure Royal Assent as early as possible in March. That provides legal authority for Departments and other public bodies to draw down and spend cash and use the resources in the Bill in 2012-13 to ensure the continuity of public services into 2013-14.

As the House is by now well aware, the preparation of the detailed Estimates and the related Budget Bill under consideration today is a difficult undertaking given the timetable involved. The Bill and the Estimates must reflect the latest financial monitoring position, which was announced to the Assembly on 22 January, and yet the Bill requires Royal Assent before the end of the financial year. It is no easy task to bring the Bill to the Assembly in that small window of opportunity. I am, therefore, grateful that the Committee for Finance and Personnel has confirmed, in line with Standing Order 42, that it is satisfied that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill and is content that the Bill proceed by accelerated passage. I welcome and appreciate the assistance of the Committee in that matter.

Given that today's debate is on the content of the Budget Bill, I shall now briefly outline the purpose of the legislation and draw attention to its main provisions. The debate follows the Bill's First Stage yesterday, which, in turn, followed the debate and approval of the Supply resolutions for the 2012-13 spring Supplementary Estimates and the 2013-14 Vote on Account. The purpose of the Bill is to give legislative effect to the 2012-13 spring Supplementary Estimates and the 2013-14 Vote on Account, which were laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2012. Copies of the Budget Bill and the explanatory and financial memorandum have been made available to Members today.

I do not intend to spend time merely repeating the detail that I gave Members yesterday. However, in accordance with the nature of the Second Stage debate envisaged under Standing Order 32 and for the benefit of Members, I will summarise briefly the Bill's main features. Its purpose is to authorise the issue of £15,459,758,000 from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund in 2012-13. That contains an additional £268,502,000 since the Main Estimates were presented last June. The cash is drawn down on a daily basis as needed from the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund, which is managed by my Department on behalf of the Executive.

The Bill also authorises the use of resources totalling £16,572,965,000 by Departments and certain other bodies. That is some £697,463,000 more than was approved in the Main Estimates in June. Members will note that the amounts are detailed in part II of each departmental spring Supplementary Estimate for 2012-13.

In addition, the Bill revises, for 2012-13, the limit on the amount of accruing resources that may be directed by my Department to be used for the purposes in column 1 of schedule 2. That limit includes both operating and non-

operating accruing resources — in other words, current and capital receipts — and amounts to £2,270,977,000.

Under section 8 of the Government Resources and Accounts Act (Northern Ireland) 2001, a direction on the actual use of the accruing resources will be provided by way of a DFP minute that will be laid before the Assembly in March, following Royal Assent to the Bill. Therefore, the Bill not only authorises the use of resources but authorises accruing resources, bringing the resources for use by Departments and other public bodies to almost £19 billion.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I would like to get through the statement, and then there will be opportunities.

The sums to be issued from the Consolidated Fund are to be appropriated by each Department or public body for services as listed in column 1 of schedule 1 to the Bill, while the resources, including accruing resources, are to be used for the purposes specified in column 1 of schedule 2 to the Bill. The amounts now requested for 2012-13 supersede the Vote on Account in the Budget Act (Northern Ireland) 2012, passed this time last year, and the Main Estimate provision in the Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012, passed by the Assembly in June 2012.

The Bill also authorises a Vote on Account for 2013-14 of cash of £7,136,563,000 and resources of £7,641,877,000 to allow the flow of cash and resources to continue to public services in the early months of 2013-14 until the Main Estimates and the related Budget Bill are approved in June this year. Again, the cash and resources are to be appropriated and used for the services and purposes set out in column 1 of schedules 3 and 4 respectively.

Finally, clause 5 authorises temporary borrowing by the Department of Finance and Personnel at a ceiling of £3,568,281,000 for 2013-14. That is approximately half of the sum authorised in clause 4(1) for issue out of the Consolidated Fund for 2013-14 and is a normal safeguard for any temporary deficiency arising in the fund. I must stress to the House that clause 5 does not provide for the issue of any additional cash out of the Consolidated Fund or convey any additional spending power, but it enables my Department to run an efficient cash management regime.

In conclusion, there is little more that I can usefully add on the detail of the Budget Bill, but I will be happy to deal with any points of principle or details that Members wish to raise. I will endeavour to answer questions relating to the wider financial environment, as I suspect that Members may not adhere too closely to the nuances of the Bill.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím an babhta seo mar Leas-Chathaoirleach an Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra. I dtús báire, ba mhaith liom a rá go gcuireann an Coiste fáilte roimh an Bhille. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I rise as Deputy Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee to speak on the Bill before us today.

Tugann an Bille atá os ár gcomhair údarás dlíthiúil le haghaidh caiteachais de réir mar atá leagtha amach i Meastacháin Bhreise an earraigh. As we have heard, the Bill provides statutory authority for expenditure, as set out in the spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13. Lena chois sin, clúdaíonn an Bille an Vóta ar Chuntas a thugann cead do Ranna Rialtais airgead agus áiseanna a chaitheamh go luath sa bhliain 2013-14 go dtí go dtéann na Príomh-Mheastacháin faoi vóta sa Tionól i mí Meithimh seo chugainn. The Bill also includes the Vote on Account, which allows Departments to incur expenditure and use resources in the early part of 2013-14 until the Main Estimates are voted on by the Assembly in June.

Standing Order 42(2) states that accelerated passage may be granted for a Budget Bill provided the Committee for Finance and Personnel is satisfied that it has been appropriately consulted on the public expenditure proposals in the Bill. On 30 January, departmental officials briefed the Committee and took questions on the Budget Bill, including questions on issues relating to a range of Departments. That evidence session represented the culmination of a process of scrutiny by the Committee of public expenditure issues throughout 2012-13, both for DFP as a Department and at a strategic and cross-departmental level. Following those evidence sessions, the Committee was content to grant accelerated passage to the Bill, and the Chairperson wrote to the Speaker to inform him of the Committee's decision.

During yesterday's debate on the SSEs, the Chair mentioned that DFP officials had explained to the Committee the technical changes that were made through in-year monitoring of resource and capital allocations. The Committee also received assurances that limited headroom had been built into the SSEs for the Department of Health and the Department of Justice. The Department of Health was allowed £15 million of headroom, £2 million of which was for dental services and £13 million for front line health and social care services. The Department of Justice was allowed just over £21 million for further resources to be allocated to the early retirement package for prison officers. Furthermore, officials informed the Committee that the SSE for DETI could be subject to change if the First Minister and the deputy First Minister approved spending for the Titanic signature project. The Committee welcomed the assurances from DFP officials that the headroom in both Departments will be monitored to ensure that allocations are used only for the agreed purposes and that any changes in DETI's SSEs will be updated accordingly.

The Committee welcomes the engagement with the Department on those issues during the quarterly monitoring rounds, and Committee members will continue to prioritise that aspect of their work. I also encourage the other Statutory Committees to continue to monitor closely the financial forecasting and expenditure of their respective Departments for the remainder of this year and during the next financial year to help ensure that underspend is minimised and Departments maximise the impact from available resources.

Idir an dá linn, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, ar son an Choiste tacaím leis an Bhille. In the meantime, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

12.00 noon

Mr Weir: I will not be able to indulge in the linguistic rhetoric of the previous Member to speak. I will try to keep my remarks in one language and keep them focused.

As a more recent recruit to the Finance and Personnel Committee — *[Interruption.]* — or perhaps, as indicated, a returnee to the Finance and Personnel Committee, I am a recidivist who has ended up there after years of absence. If not the outgoing Finance Minister, the incoming one will appreciate the film reference to the much-maligned 'The Godfather: Part III', in which Michael Corleone said that every time he thinks that he has got out, they keep dragging him back in. I feel that I have a somewhat similar relationship with the Finance and Personnel Committee.

As a member of the Committee, I welcome the Budget that is before us. It is a Budget for stability, rather than what happened many years ago, when we had Budgets that ping-ponged about from year to year. This is part of a long-term plan. Indeed, the Budget's parameters were largely set even before the Assembly election. I do not doubt that we will hear many worthy calls in today's debate from Members in all parts of the House who would like to see more expenditure in various financial areas. There is no doubt that worthy statements will be made, and I believe that Departments need to be proactive in debating whether their priorities are right. However, we must all accept that we are operating under a level of financial constraint because of the block grant and some of the cutbacks made by the coalition Government. That limits what we would like to do. I am sure that the Finance Minister would like to spend a lot more money on a range of subjects, but he is prudent, obviously, in looking at how we can live within our means.

Despite that, we are still able to commit £1·3 billion in capital investment, which, in these hard-pressed times, is sustaining the construction industry in particular. Sometimes, the role played by government in achieving that is ignored, but it is very productive. As well as creating a sense of stability, the Budget retains its focus. At the start of this term, the Programme for Government reiterated the concentration on the economy as the number one priority, and I believe that this Budget helps the economy. It does so principally by ensuring that the burden on taxpayers and on businesses is kept to a minimum. The Budget reinforces a number of measures, particularly the effective freezing, in real terms, of the regional rate for domestic and non-domestic ratepayers. Since the Assembly was restored in 2007, we have ensured that the regional rate increase has been kept at zero or, at most, at the level of inflation. So, businesses and citizens throughout Northern Ireland should be able to look forward yet again to a rate rise that is no greater than inflation. I know of the prudent response of a lot of councils, and it is important, at this stage, that they do not take advantage of that by saying, "Well, because there is not a major rise coming from the Executive, we can simply bump up the rates at a local level". That would be highly irresponsible and would convey the wrong attitude to local traders. Fortunately, I am aware of councils that will keep increases at zero or at a very low level this year.

The Budget contains other measures, in particular rates relief for small businesses, which was pioneered by the Finance Minister. The Finance Minister has been able to extend that this year, so another 3,500 businesses will be able to take advantage of it. We have also seen the rates concession that allows empty premises to be rejuvenated for a business. Indeed, that has already helped to stimulate town centres. Again, that is a question of the Executive delivering for people in terms of the rate burden that is upon them. The funding of that has been mentioned, because it does not come at no cost at all. In many ways, the retail levy on large businesses is not punitive but actually tries to rebalance the rates process and create a more level playing field for both small businesses and the large retail units. Despite many of the dire predictions that were issued some time ago, it has not met with the complications that some people predicted.

While I am on the broader issue of rates, I will point out that it is noticeable that, in respect of domestic rates and, indeed, the overall financial burden on people in Northern Ireland, there is, on average, perhaps a difference of more than £500 from the domestic rates that would have been paid under direct rule. Some of those who are calling for a return to direct rule need to bear that in mind. It is about delivering for people on the ground.

I welcome the recent work that has been done on the RPA to find a package that provides proper funding. We need to realise — this feeds into the Budget — that there has been, both from some in the Chamber and some in the wider sector, a false argument about the balance between local government and central government in paying for that. What we should consistently strive to do and what the Budget strives to do is to get the best possible value for money and the biggest bang for our bucks. We should not look to spend any money unnecessarily.

As well as looking after the broader business sector and ensuring that there is the minimum burden on it, where we can do so, we should be creative in our economics and ensure that we have properly targeted changes for our budgetary position. Recently, the House welcomed the moves that were made on air passenger duty. That has been a focused reduction. It has not cost the Budget an enormous amount of money but could pay high dividends and, indeed, has been concentrated on where it will actually make a difference. Similarly, as the Executive strive on the issue of corporation tax, that could also, in the long run, be a game changer. It is obviously not before us today.

It is important that money is set aside to try to deal with the most vulnerable in our society and those who are at the edges of poverty. For example, in terms of making a real, long-term change on the ground and the impact of the social investment fund, which will actually try to lift areas out of poverty by way of a strategic, long-term plan, I am glad to see that there is a further commitment to that. I am glad to see that groups that, at times, get ignored through funding streams are catered for. So, for example, as regards dormant bank accounts, there is a particular concentration on children and young people and, particularly, on faith groups, which are sometimes restricted in what they can apply for. It is also the case that, as we move ahead with welfare reform — I appreciate that there are mixed views across the Chamber on welfare reform and that the extent to which we have flexibility is limited — there is a commitment by the Executive to try to ameliorate the worst aspects of welfare reform.

I conclude by referring to one particular area, which came up time and time again and found unanimity. One of the barriers to welfare reform and employability in Northern Ireland is the lack of comparable childcare provision and the lack of affordability. Consequently, while we await the wider announcement of a childcare strategy from OFMDFM fairly soon, I am glad to see the commitment to

the childcare strategy in the Budget. At the moment, the money that is ring-fenced there is essentially to pump-prime activity by other Departments. Getting a childcare strategy right from a financial point of view can end up being a win-win for the Executive. It will meet the need to bring us into line with other parts of the United Kingdom, and it will free people up, increase their employability and help to lift them out of poverty.

When you scratch beneath the surface, there is much in the Budget Bill to commend it. I welcome Second Stage and look forward to supporting it later.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his opening comments and the Deputy Chair, Dominic Bradley, for outlining the Committee's position, which he did scrupulously, accurately and fairly. My broad intention is not to repeat that but to examine a number of problems. As Peter Weir indicated, our strategic approach over a four-year Budget period allows for a developmental approach and enables a much more strategic perspective to emerge.

If we consider, for instance, that our number one priority for a number of these Budget periods has been to grow and rebalance the economy, there is the issue of missed targets. There is a pressing need — I am not approaching this on the basis that this is Sinn Féin doing what Sinn Féin would do — for the Assembly to look at whether the same inputs will continue to give us the same outputs. If we do not change the inputs, we need to examine what we have been doing and whether we have all the necessary tools.

Clearly, if we expect the public sector economy to lead to a general economic recovery, we will wait for a very long time. My view is that we should first acknowledge the general malaise in international economies. It was certainly not the public sector that caused those problems, and many of the issues in the private sector are beyond the reach of the Assembly. When it comes to the role of the banks in supporting local enterprise, we have to live with the reality that the accountability mechanism does not reside here. The officials and representatives of the major banks whom we met are acutely aware that they are not accountable to the Assembly. They have a public relations responsibility, which they meet, and they bring in their public relations experts to assist them in that task.

It can be frustrating and difficult to get the outcomes that give assurance and hope to existing businesses and to those who are anxious to develop their entrepreneurial skills and instincts and would look for support from the financial sector to identify that all the necessary leverages exist. It is time that the Assembly looked at that because, if we were to examine our Programme for Government targets over successive mandates, we would clearly see that this is an issue that we come up against time and time again. That results in our falling short of our expectations and does not justify the view that there is an international recession that we can do nothing about.

This is a time when we should be prepared, working with other Administrations, to look at the pros and cons. We should not be deflected from that course by people waving price tags in front of us. Missed or lost opportunities also come with price tags. As an Assembly, we can learn from other assemblies that are looking at taking on more powers. That will have implications for the block grant, and there are cost factors to be examined. However, as we have a track record of missing targets that we set for ourselves, it is incumbent on us to formulate a different approach.

I make an appeal to the Minister. This Budget represents what has been agreed by us, and I do not cavil about that at all; I support it. The Minister and his Department have steered the other Departments to a path that has ensured its faithful application. There may be variations in performance, but the strategy is the right one. Let us agree in advance and then let us devolve, evolve and make amendments through the various processes that we have developed and that I think will stand up to the test.

12.15 pm

It is at the strategic level that we are being challenged. The time has come at least to begin to discuss that strategic level. Discussing ideas and thinking through processes does not cost any money. It is a question of developing new strategies and approaches if we can. Hopefully, that will find more traction in the Assembly, and, as people move forward, we will begin to examine how we can represent our existing private sector and its potential and, in particular, our young people. Can we develop synergies between, say, the policies of DETI and DEL to ensure that we meet the skills gaps in our workforce that are costing us jobs? I hear news announcements about jobs, clients who are being interviewed, trade missions abroad and whatever, and all of that is sound. However, I would like to see more analysis of why particular investments did not occur or were relocated — sometimes not all that far from here — to see what we might do to amend our approach and get a different outcome. That is my response to what I think is an otherwise sound approach. If we continue our progress in job creation with the same inputs, we will unfortunately continue to get the same outputs.

Mr Cree: I was struck by the Minister's opening comments. They bore a striking resemblance to my own, so I can only assume that he has got it right.

Yesterday, we approved the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account. The existing legislation that gave authority to spend cash and use resources is now out of date. The new Bill needs to be put in place before the end of the financial year. We have just heard Mr McLaughlin talking about the four-year Budget, and this will complete the second year of the Budget for 2011-15 . The Main Estimates for the third year will be voted on in June. That is important, because we are now looking at being three quarters of the way through the Budget. As the Member who spoke previously said, targets need to be achieved. There is little time left in the plan to get it right. Therefore, when we get the detail of the Estimates in June, it is important that we have the full figures on all aspects of the Budget and that they are delivered to Committees in time for them to scrutinise them effectively. That does not always happen.

I share the Minister's concern that Departments are returning high levels of reduced requirements and even bids that have been sought in-year. That is still a major problem that needs to be addressed. I repeat what I said yesterday: more care and good management are needed from Departments in handling their budgets, and that really has to start now.

Another serious development is the Audit Office report on Departments' claimed savings. The report is most scathing and casts major doubts on whether savings were achieved at all. Some two thirds of the cases that the Audit Office examined were not efficiency savings. How does the Minister propose to deal with that situation? Those savings were obviously a significant part of our Budget. Does this mean that the figures will have to be reworked? If those are not genuine efficiency savings, that will have an effect on the total Budget envelope.

I wish to share with the House that, in a reply to a recent question, the Minister of Finance advised me that the Education Minister had told him that the Department of Education would not participate in the savings delivery plan monitoring exercises. That is the same Education Minister who has been attempting to block the financial review process. Minister, can you do anything to move those issues forward, or do the Executive need to do something to achieve an adequate solution to that problem? We were assured at St Andrews that no Minister would be allowed to block any proceedings, yet here are two major issues that we have difficulties with.

Members will be aware of the difficulties caused by the refusal of the application for a European contribution to the Titanic project. Can the Minister assure the House that the same sum has been allocated to specific projects in the Budget, and can he identify those so that we can be assured that the cash resource will not be lost this year? My understanding is that the money can be used only for existing projects in the Budget if we are to save that £18·2 million.

We are told that the Department has built in enough headroom to safeguard against late underspending this year. At the last count, there was an overprovision of £26 million. Perhaps the Minister could update the House on the latest figure.

Later in the debate, my colleagues will highlight other concerns that the Ulster Unionist Party has about other departmental budgets. I make the point again that it is imperative that we are all aware of the issues in the Budget, the knock-on effects and their implications for the remainder of this year. We must be aware of how important that will be when we deal with the Estimates for the Budget for 2013-14 in June of this year.

Mr Dickson: I, too, support the Bill. I am glad to take part in this debate, following yesterday's discussions on the Supply resolution. I will concentrate on some issues concerning the Department for Regional Development, as I am a member of the relevant Committee, and how they relate to the way in which we approach the Budget generally.

The Department for Regional Development is the largest capital-based Department. The major cuts in capital expenditure in this Budget period present DRD with a significant challenge. The scale of that challenge is even more apparent when one considers the Department's remit for securing transport and water infrastructure and the significant investment that both those areas require. I appreciate that, to an extent, we are still recovering from some of the financial decisions taken under direct rule, but we still have not addressed the historical underinvestment as effectively as possible.

I would be one of the first to welcome additional funding for more sustainable forms of transport. Indeed, I was delighted that, through the extra investment announced in the January monitoring round, extra buses would be provided. However, when it comes to the general principles with which we approach our Budget, it seems that we do not take the need to invest in public transport sufficiently seriously. When, for example, the Committee for Regional Development scrutinised the draft Programme for Government, we were told that, from the Budget figures presented at that time, bus replacement funding was minimal. It was so minimal, in fact, that the funding allocation for the 2013-14 financial year would have paid for half a bus. Why do we make such small allocations to public transport when formulating the initial Budget, leaving the replacement of buses dependent on whether other Departments spend all the money allocated to them?

I understand that we are a car-dependent society. In fact, we are the second most car-dependent society in Europe. Therefore, we need to provide in the Budget for essential road schemes and maintenance. I also understand that the solution to those problems is not always to throw large sums of money at them, and that we need to use other methods at our disposal to change attitudes about the way in which we travel. For example, we need to encourage more active and sustainable travel to schools, which was the topic of a recent debate in the Chamber. It would be equally wrong to claim that there is no impact from the continuing imbalance in our transport budget. We are still missing the targets for investment in public transport set out in DRD policy documents. That should be a major cause of concern. Our approach to the Budget should be to practise what we preach and back up the agreed targets with appropriate action. Why, for example, do we state in policy documents that we should have a 65:35 balance between roads and public transport investment, yet continue to allocate less than 20% to the latter year after year? Perhaps we need to take the targets set out in policy documents more seriously when putting the Budget together.

We cannot continue to live in denial of the way in which we spend our money, and nowhere is that illustrated more clearly than in how we approach the question of Northern Ireland Water. The House has today voted the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill through to the next stage. When it passes, it will commit the Assembly, the Minister and the Budget to hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure over the next three years, yet we still have not had a proper discussion about the future of Northern Ireland Water. It certainly was the elephant in the room during the Regional Development Committee's examination of the Bill, and, no doubt, other members of the Committee will share my frustration and discomfort at having to scrutinise such a Bill with absolutely no idea what the Minister is planning and how that will affect future Budgets. We need, at least, to start by having an honest, open and detailed debate on the future of water and how it is financed in Northern Ireland.

In the economic circumstances that we face, it is particularly important that all spending is extensively scrutinised and can be wholly justified. That is not happening with the funding of our water service and infrastructure. To be honest, we are poorly served by our current policy. We have to approach our finances with maturity. It is no good to keep telling the public that we

can afford things that we cannot, and we definitely cannot afford to keep diverting hundreds of millions of pounds from other essential services because some do not want to make difficult decisions about the future governance and financing of our water system. I cannot honestly tell my constituents that, when Budgets go by year after year, the current water arrangements are in their best interests, not when £280 million a year or thereabouts is being taken out of hospital and school budgets to pay for it. We need to address the water issue urgently and to put systems in place that are fair and protect the most vulnerable and do not drain resources from the services on which they most depend. To summarise, when it comes to the Budget, issues need to be addressed, and you do not need to look much further than the DRD budget to identify some of those.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. 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 12.27 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementary questions should not be read.

Roads: Review of Public Administration

1. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions have taken place between his Department and the Department of the Environment regarding responsibility for some of the road network being handed over to the new councils under the review of public administration. *(AQO 3373/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): No discussions are taking place regarding responsibility for some of the road network being handed over to the new councils under the review of public administration (RPA).

In September 2009, Executive colleagues agreed a revised list of functions that were identified as being appropriate for transfer to local councils. These included pedestrian zone permits; permitting local events to be held on roads; alley gating; and off-street and on-street parking enforcement. In June 2010, the Executive agreed to reframe the timetable for the reform of local government, which would see the functions transfer by 2015. My Department remains committed to the review of public administration and continues to work closely with colleagues in the Department of the Environment to deliver the objective of the local government reform programme.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is he aware of any parcels of ground in adopted areas for which no one accepts responsibility?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. To be fair, it is not directly related to the review of public administration. I am aware, of course, that there are substantial portions of ground all over Northern Ireland where ownership is not established. For a Department such as the Department for Regional Development to assume or to take under its control the ownership of such portions of land would be expensive and would also bring liabilities that we would have to be very careful about managing.

Mr Hussey: Is the Minister still keen for off-street parking to be devolved to local councils? He referred to a thing called RPA, which I am not very keen to see happening at all. Are you keen for off-street parking to be devolved to local councils?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am indeed very keen to see off-street parking. Local government, in whatever shape or form the councils are in, could perform a useful duty and service on behalf of local ratepayers to manage it. It would give councils the authority to decide on thorny issues such as charging, rates of charge and penalty charge notices. I am interested in that, and I will continue to have discussions not only with

the Minister of the Environment but with local councils, if they are so minded to engage on that possible transfer.

Mr P Ramsey: In the Minister's initial response, he said that it had been decided that it was appropriate for powers to be devolved in certain areas such as residential parking, alley gating and, possibly, road safety initiatives through traffic calming. Is it not the case that local government can play a meaningful part, in that it is the right place for accountability and the right place to which to devolve those responsibilities, even much earlier than anticipated?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and he made a valid point. Issues such as pedestrian zone permits, local events held on roads — presumably aside from parades and other possibly contentious issues — alley gating, off-street and on-street parking could usefully be transferred to local government, where local knowledge would be best employed.

Park-and-ride Facilities: South Antrim

2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of his recent announcement on the park-and-ride facility at Ballyhenry/Sandyknowes roundabout, whether his Department has considered any further sites in the south Antrim area. *(AQO 3374/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: My Department's park-and-ride programme board is in the process of finalising a strategic programme for the delivery of park-and-ride sites between 2013 and 2015. The draft programme includes proposals for two sites in the South Antrim constituency. One proposal is for the construction of a large park-and-ride site at Ballymartin Road, Templepatrick, and the other proposal is to extend the existing park-and-ride site at the Paradise Walk/Antrim Road roundabout.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. What deliberations has the Department for Regional Development had with Invest NI about what I call "the green elephant", which is the Global Point site at Corr's Corner? Since it was purchased, some 130 acres have been lying with absolutely nothing on them for 22 years

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am aware of the Corr's Corner site that he speaks of, and, obviously, some discussions need to be ongoing with other Departments about it. No conclusions have yet been reached, but we will continue to look at it as a potential site. Certainly, we are still in the early stages of its development.

Mr Kinahan: I apologise for giving the Minister a crick in his neck by asking him a question from directly behind him. How many additional park-and-ride spaces have been made available in the past two years? Will he look at other places in south Antrim in time to see whether there are other places where we can have park-and-ride facilities?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I trust him implicitly, even though he is behind me. I am sure that he is behind me all the way.

The good news for the Member and the House is that over 1,000 additional park-and-ride and park-and-share spaces have been provided in the past two years. That is an increase of over one quarter of the total number available. Of course, we continue to look at and to identify sites not only in south Antrim but elsewhere throughout Northern Ireland. We will continue to do so, because park-and-ride and park-and-share facilities have the potential to bring about a modal shift in how people travel, particularly by car. I think that the ability to park and ride and to park and share is increasingly seen as a huge benefit. So, we will continue to look at potential sites, including in the south Antrim area.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Now that we have him on the subject of park-and-ride facilities, is he aware of the efforts that have been made for the procurement of a park-and-ride site on the A6 at Dungiven?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and for his dogged pursuance of the A6 issue, whether that is for a scheme to improve the road itself or to add park-and-ride facilities. Of course, for such a major scheme, we would seek to explore opportunities for park-and-ride or park-and-share facilities. I am not directly aware of the current situation on the identification of sites at the moment, but I undertake to write to the Member and update him.

Mr Eastwood: I welcome the Minister's commitment to park-and-ride schemes. Further to that, will his Department be supporting park-and-ride schemes in the city of Derry during the 2013 City of Culture celebrations?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I was pleased last week to open a new park-and-ride facility and park-and-share facility at Drumahoe, which serves the city of Londonderry and the wider area. The UK City of Culture year is an opportunity for people to avail of transport arrangements that will benefit Londonderry. In the longer term, I see huge benefits for it. I think that it is a good example of having provided such a facility and of increasing its capacity, and I look forward to continuing to do that.

The Member will also know that, where the UK City of Culture is concerned, I am very pleased to confirm that the rail link between Coleraine and Londonderry will open earlier than expected. I know that Members all through the House will receive that well, particularly those who have constituencies in the north-west. I take particular pride in the achievement of being the Minister who saved, if you like, the rail link between Coleraine and Londonderry and who, hopefully, enhanced the service between Belfast and Londonderry.

Road Signs

3. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister for Regional Development how many incidents of defacing road signs have been reported in the last 12 months. *(AQO 3375/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm there have been 244 reports of road signs being defaced in the past 12 months. The majority of damaged signs are identified by Roads Service officials as part of their routine inspections and are prioritised for replacement or repair as necessary. If sufficient evidence is available, Roads Service may seek prosecution of those responsible for carrying out those wanton acts of vandalism. I am sure that you will appreciate the many difficulties in proving a case in

this regard, as the courts require substantial and clear evidence before an effective prosecution can be brought.

I am also sure that the Member shares my frustration that my Department has to devote valuable resources, both in expenditure and staff time, to deal with the issue when they could be used much more profitably on other activities, many of which are safety related, that would provide great benefit to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Sandra Overend.

Mrs Overend: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Apologies; I call Gregory Campbell for a supplementary question.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his reply regarding the 244 cases. Will he undertake to consider — where there have been repeated incidents of vandalism of whatever type, particularly on main routes where tourists or others are unused to the journey — the possibility of replacing the signs with signage located higher to make it more difficult for the offence to be repeated?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. We look, on an ongoing basis, at how best we can protect the existing signs and ensure that they become less easy to attack. However, some people make determined efforts to deface or vandalise signs, and that is very regrettable indeed. I know that that is a concern for many Members, and Londonderry signage seems to be a particular target in the northern and western divisions.

Officials from the northern division advised me that there have been 34 incidents of road sign defacement over the past 12 months in that area. Although we do not keep detailed records of how signs are defaced, we estimate that that vandalism occurs approximately four to six times a year. So, there are serial offenders out there. I wish that they would stop it, and I wish that we could spend the money on other equally important, or more important, ways to improve road maintenance and generally within the Roads Service budget.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware of a proliferation of signs being defaced in the Dunloy, Rasharkin and Portglenone areas of County Antrim?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I am not aware of the specific detail. I am happy to learn of any representations that he wishes to make to me.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he detail how many incidents of flags flying on road signs or lamp posts have been reported to him and what action he is taking to remove them?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question. I do not have the specific detail available at this point. However, I am happy to correspond with her. She will recognise that, as with the issue of the defacement of road signs, it is a delicate and, sometimes, difficult matter to police, but we endeavour to seek a way to resolve issues of particular contention.

A5 Road Project

4. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the A5 project. *(AQO 3376/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 project is the subject of an ongoing legal challenge that began today and is processing as anticipated.

My Department continues to work closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel regarding future budgets for the A5 and any financial implications arising from the delayed start to the scheme. That co-operation has enabled some internal reprofiling of my Department's budget, which will facilitate the deferral of some of the A5 allocation to when it is required. In addition, at my prompting, the Finance Minister has secured flexibility from Her Majesty's Treasury to carry forward £50 million of reinvestment and reform initiative borrowing power into 2014-15. That additional flexibility is immensely helpful in managing the ongoing delay to the A5 project.

2.15 pm

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his response. What recent discussions has he had with the Dublin Government about funding for the middle section of the A5?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will remember that the Irish Government had initially agreed to make a very substantial contribution that would have seen the entire project brought forward. That was not possible. They have now agreed to make two payments of £25 million in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Beyond that, they remain committed to the completion of the A5, but they are not yet in a position to make further funding commitments for the period post-2016 in advance of their consideration of the next capital review framework, which is anticipated for 2015.

DRD: Procurement

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps he has taken to ensure that public procurement within his Department encourages competition and is attractive to local businesses. *(AQO 3377/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: Recent reviews of our tender processes have helped to remove barriers for smaller businesses wishing to compete for public sector opportunities. Examples include reductions in the levels of experience and financial requirements needed and the use of more standardised tendering documentation. My officials have also streamlined and simplified procedures for tenders below the EU thresholds and reduced the paperwork associated with tendering for those contracts.

To increase the visibility of tendering opportunities, all contracts above £30,000 are advertised on the eSourcing Northern Ireland portal, with construction-related contracts also advertised on the Department's website. All those measures are supported by a programme of meet-the-buyer events, organised or attended by representatives from the respective centres of procurement expertise.

There is close liaison with local industry groups, such as the Construction Employers Federation and the Quarry

Products Association, to help provide for a sustainable supply chain. It has been recognised that there can be difficulties for smaller businesses seeking to access large frameworks and term-type contracts. For that reason, in areas of work such as road maintenance and minor works, contracts have been split into numerous specific work categories. Limitations are imposed on the geographical coverage and the value of the contracts, which, in turn, permits small to medium enterprises to participate directly, thus providing increased competition.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for that fulsome answer. Does he accept that there is a perception among the small business community and small contractors that there is a cartel operating around public procurement and that it is counterproductive to developing and growing small business, particularly in the construction sector, which relates to the Department for Regional Development (DRD)?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. If that is his perception, I hope that it is not the reality of things. I understand the importance of small to medium enterprises getting the opportunity to tender for and attain work contracts from the Department for Regional Development, Roads Service, NI Water and all the agencies under my departmental control. I am keen to hear at first hand examples that he may have, and if he has such examples, we will investigate and interrogate those and satisfy ourselves that it is not the case that we are in any way discriminating against small businesses.

Mr Cree: On supporting local businesses, Minister, will you tell the House how your Department and its arm's-length bodies perform in respect of prompt payment of invoices?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary. He raises an important issue, particularly for those in business who are under pressure and so need and seek prompt payment for their work. That is an essential action to support local industry.

Following commitments that the public sector would speed up the payments process, I can confirm that my Department continues to perform exceptionally well against the 10-day and 30-day prompt payment targets. From September to November 2012, DRD released procurement and grant payments totalling £60 million, of which £58·2 million, 97%, was paid within 10 days. In the same period, 8,209 of 8,320 invoices, an impressive 99%, were paid within 30 days. Overall, therefore, the Department continues to perform above the Northern Ireland Civil Service average.

Public Transport

6. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the steps he has taken to encourage integrated public transport involving Translink, community transport groups, health and social care trusts and education and library boards. *(AQO 3378/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: My Department is working with Translink, the Southern Education and Library Board, the rural community transport partnerships, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and representatives of the health trusts to identify opportunities for improvements to the integration and efficiency of publicly funded transport services. To assess the short-, medium- and long-term changes that are possible, it is proposed to undertake a pilot project in the Dungannon/Cookstown area. It is expected that, after a period of planning, the pilot project will begin later this year, followed by an evaluation, the duration of which has yet to be decided.

Local stakeholders will be involved at key points throughout the project. My Department is also providing funding through the rural transport fund for a pilot Translink bus service from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Area Hospital. The rural community transport partnerships have been involved in the development of the pilot project.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree that there is an urgent requirement to develop more integrated transport to reduce costs and increase usage?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary, and I agree with his point. In these straitened times, it is important that we are able to do more, even with less in some circumstances. The Member will be aware of my announcement this morning on Door-2-Door Transport, which received a broad welcome in the House. We continue to look at these transport issues and will seek to make progress on them on the understanding that working with other Departments and agencies is surely in the short-, medium- and long-term interests of everybody.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister provide an update on the pilot scheme in mid-Ulster?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary. He will know that a range of agencies is involved in the Dungannon/Cookstown pilot scheme, including health, education and those related to my Department. We very much hope that rolling out that pilot scheme will assist us in developing Province-wide transport arrangements. I undertake to update the House and members of the Committee for Regional Development on progress.

Mr Storey: Translink receives something like a 30% subsidy from the Department of Education for transport costs. What discussions has he had with the Minister of Education about the performance and efficiency delivery unit report on transport and a more efficient way of ensuring a joined-up approach to its provision, particularly for schools in rural areas? There is a real issue there, and it will be an increasing issue if the Education Minister gets his way on the proposed closure of rural schools.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, which was asked, I suppose, with his education hat on. It is timely.

I have not had direct discussions with the Education Minister. I do, however, believe that it is in everyone's interests that Departments and Ministers work collectively to address issues. We can do more together and achieve favourable outcomes, particularly in the current economic climate. I will seek to work with Executive colleagues on that.

Public Transport: Door-2-Door Services

Mr Molloy: Question 6. Sorry, question 7.

7. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his plans to combine urban and rural door-to-door services to enable better integration of services and to improve efficiency. *(AQO 3379/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I will answer question 7, if that is all right? I know that the Member is perhaps besotted with other issues, but anyway.

The Member will be aware of the statement that I made earlier to the House on the future of the Door-2-Door service. Work has been completed on reviewing the policy for the Door-2-Door scheme, and a consultation exercise commenced on 22 October 2012. The consultation ended on 14 January 2013, and responses are currently being analysed and assessed.

I do not think that it is appropriate to continue to extend the existing single tender awards for the provision of the service. I have therefore decided that my Department will end the existing contracts with the three current operators when the single tender actions run out on 31 March.

It is obviously very important that current regular users of the Door-2-Door service are not left without any service for a period. Therefore, although the current Door-2-Door service will end for now when the extensions run out on 31 March, I have decided that, to meet the needs of existing users, we will put in place an interim service, managed by Disability Action and with services provided by it, other voluntary organisations and, where applicable, other service providers, from 1 April. I stress that the interim service is not, and is not intended to be, the existing Door-2-Door service. My officials are working with Disability Action and other stakeholders to ensure that the interim service will be fully operational before the Easter break. Scheme members will be kept fully informed of the changes being implemented.

In parallel, my officials have set up a project team to move forward the procurement of Door-2-Door-type services in the future. It is our intention to commence pilot operations later this year and to evaluate their effectiveness after a year of operation. Thereafter, we intend to tender for service provision that will best meet the needs of our intended users.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister. I think that he missed his calling earlier.

Will he give us an indication that the current rural transport providers will be considered as part of the new project when it comes into being? Looking further ahead, will the Minister consider whether all the different services that we use should be under one transport management scheme, for schools, health and all the other different structures?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. His final suggestion has, of course, enormous consequences, and yet it is interesting and challenging enough that we should look at it and all other options. The interim arrangements that I announced today will give us an opportunity to look at the entire landscape. I very much hope that we can be innovative in our approach and can utilise and work collectively with the various agencies, Departments, groups and providers out there.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answers. I listened very carefully to what he said. Given that he would be of a mind to encourage the integration of the different transport providers, will he consider setting up an independent transport authority, similar to what happens in the Republic, to maximise competition and give the public the best possible opportunities? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Kennedy: Thank you very much for that supplementary question. I think that mention of integration with the Republic has caused some concern on the Back Benches.

We are very much in the foothills. We are making interim arrangements for the Door-2-Door service, with a view to having a longer-term solution. I am not keen on the creation of additional bodies, which can sometimes be overly bureaucratic and perhaps not represent value for money.

I am prepared, at this stage, to concentrate on improving and maintaining the local services that are in place.

2.30 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Deputy Speaker: I advise Members that question 11 has been transferred to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. A written answer will be provided.

Farming: Income

1. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the recent publication of provisional figures showing that total income from farming between 2011 and 2012 fell by more than 50%. *(AQO 3385/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The magnitude of the fall in farm income is of great concern to me. I have heard the figures described as horrendous, and I absolutely agree with that assessment. The figures confirm just how exceptionally difficult last year was for farmers. I have the utmost respect for how our farmers have faced the extreme challenges of the last wee while.

During 2012, a number of factors converged to put real financial pressure on the industry. On top of poor weather conditions throughout much of the growing season, we had a substantial rise in feed costs and a weakening of the euro, which reduced single farm payment receipts and held back producer prices. Those were very painful events but, unfortunately, world cereal harvests, local weather conditions and exchange rate movements are all factors that fall completely outside our control. The industry had grown in the years preceding 2012, and I believe that the potential for growth still exists despite the major setback for the industry last year. I believe that we should continue our work not just to improve competitiveness but to build an industry that has the strength and resilience to withstand the types of setback recently witnessed.

The 2012 figures clearly demonstrate that we continue to need a strong, well-funded CAP that not only supports farmers but drives competitiveness, without drowning us in red tape. I am fighting for those outcomes in the ongoing CAP reform negotiations. I very much hope that this year will see a marked improvement in the fortunes of the industry and that we can once again turn our attention

to the longer-term challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. I will play my part, and I look forward to working with the industry-led Agri-Food Strategy Board in building an industry that is robust, outward-looking, self-reliant and prosperous.

In respect of immediate action, I have announced my intention to bring forward the payment of the 2013 less-favoured area (LFA) scheme. We are making the payments some three weeks earlier than planned. That is a contribution of about £25 million a year to the economy. In addition, we have already begun —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mrs O'Neill: OK. We have also begun administrative checks. We will continue to get things speeded up as quickly as possible to ensure that we get support to farmers.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answer. I know that she cannot change the weather or the feed prices, and I welcome the change to the LFA scheme that she has just mentioned. We need to make sure that people are paid on time and quickly, given that that is one of the only ways for them to get money. What changes will the Minister make to her policies to assist the industry? The increase in world population has to be one of the ways of increasing what our farmers get from their land.

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I firmly believe that the change in world population is a plus for our local industry, because we have an opportunity to produce more food and to be a major player in supplying that market. There are opportunities.

Reform of the common agricultural policy will be very important in making sure that we target the supports that need to be in place for particular sectors in the entire agrifood industry. The work of the Agri-Food Strategy Board will also be key in tackling and identifying challenges and allowing us to shape the new programme and tailor supports to those who most need them. The growing world population is a plus for us, and we need to use that to our advantage. I certainly assure the Member that I will do all that I can, through short-, medium- and long-term plans, to support the industry.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does the Minister accept that there is great anxiety and apprehension in the farming community at the moment? Does she also accept that the new mapping system is proving to be a fiasco for many farmers? Some of them are trying to remedy the discrepancies in the maps, but they have been told that they cannot get an interview at their local office for about another three weeks.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. Again, I assure him that I will do all I can to support farmers. The mapping situation has been discussed many times in the House and, indeed, in Committee. It is important that the maps are got right. I totally accept that it is a two-way process. It is about the Department and the farmers working together. I am not aware of delays in getting an appointment to talk about a map or to explore the issue further at DARD Direct offices, but I am happy to take that on board and ensure that the proper staff are there to help farmers. Obviously, the benefit of having DARD Direct offices is that you can get someone quite easily and quite accessibly, so I am happy to take that on board.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will no doubt be aware that there is a lack of confidence in the agriculture industry, with the horse meat issue —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not relevant to this question.

Mr I McCrea: I am coming to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: If you are not very quickly relevant in your supplementary, we will move on.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister accept that within that confidence is the confidence of young people to go into farming, as it is part of their family heritage? What will the Minister do to encourage that?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. He is absolutely right: we need to instil confidence, and we need to have supports in place that attract young people to stay on the farm or come into farming. Again, under the common agricultural policy, there are targeted streams that we can have the flexibility to use. They will look at new entrants into farming and young farmers. So, I think there are avenues there that allow us to support young people. If we are going to have a sustainable farming sector in the future, we need young people to continue to become involved in the industry, and we will do all that we can. I will continue to work with the likes of the young farmers' organisations, which do great work with young farmers. I fund them to do some work, and I will continue to do that. I think that a combination of all of those efforts will attract young people into the farming industry.

Rural White Paper Action Plan

2. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the rural White Paper action plan. *(AQO 3386/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: In June 2012, I launched the rural White Paper action plan, following close consultation with my ministerial colleagues and a wide range of rural stakeholders. The action plan contains around 90 commitments from across all Departments, relating to a wide range of important rural issues: rural transport, rural broadband, healthcare, education in rural areas, rural tourism, support for rural businesses and measures to tackle poverty and social isolation.

I want to be clear that rural issues are not solely the responsibility of my Department. All Departments have a responsibility to deliver their policies and programmes effectively in rural areas and to honour their commitments detailed in the rural White Paper action plan. Each commitment or action is allocated to a lead Department to take forward, with most actions to be undertaken within a short — one to three years — medium — three to five — or long-term — five to 10 years — timeframe.

Two projects that are already making significant progress and helping rural communities throughout the North are the farm family health checks and maximising access in rural areas (MARA), which are being delivered in conjunction with the Department of Health via the Public Health Agency. The farm family health check programme aims to screen 1,800 rural dwellers at farmers' marts and community venues. To date, I am pleased to say that 38 health checks have taken place, all of which have been very well received. Some 920 rural dwellers have availed

themselves of the service, and 40% of attendees have been advised to attend their GP on the basis of the results of the screenings.

The aim of the MARA project is to offer 12,000 rural households a visit from a trained enabler, and that is well under way. One hundred rural enablers have been recruited and trained, and approximately 1,000 initial home visits have been completed, with second visits, where necessary, under way. To date, we have had over 2,880 referrals on a variety of grants, benefits and services.

I have chaired a meeting of the interdepartmental committee on rural policy. That group consists of senior policy officials and is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the rural White Paper.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for her answer. How will she ensure that other Departments deliver on their commitments in the action plan?

Mrs O'Neill: I did not quite get to finish the answer, but that is the point that I was coming to.

I oversee the Department's oversee group, which will hold all Departments to account. This is Executive-led. Even though DARD takes responsibility, it is an Executive programme to make sure that we have all Departments taking cognisance of the needs of rural areas. Each action in the rural White Paper is allocated to a lead Department that has responsibility for implementing that action within the time frame specified. The Executive have agreed that all Departments will report to DARD regularly on progress in implementing their respective actions, and DARD will produce and submit an annual progress report to the Executive. I will make sure that that continues to be done. I reiterate the point that this is an Executive commitment. DARD is taking the lead, but it is important to show the wider rural community that this is the Executive caring about their interests and making sure that they are protected.

Mr Storey: Actions 49, 50 and 51 of the action plan that has been published by the Department have DE as the lead Department. Does the Agriculture Minister use the same definition of a rural school as her counterpart and colleague — that it is 105? If she does, given the vast number of rural schools in the primary sector that fall well below that, particularly in the west of the Province, does she agree that that figure will inevitably lead to the widespread closure of rural schools? In light of the action plan, what is she doing to protect rural schools?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, although DARD is in the lead, it is Executive work. The Member, as Chair of the Education Committee, knows fine well that it is not simply a numbers game. All the other factors need to be taken into account, particularly the fact that a rural school is often the centre of a rural community. When the Education Minister set out the six criteria in the sustainable schools policy, he took into account all those other factors. I will ensure, in my role to support rural communities, that those arguments are always put forward. I am happy to do so, and I have done so in the past for schools in my constituency. The Education Minister has taken account of the wider factors. It should not simply be a numbers game, and that is well accepted.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister indicate the scale of the redrafting of the document following the consultation process? Was she surprised by the critical response from many in the industry who had waited for the plan for many years but then felt badly let down by the totally unimaginative proposals?

Mrs O'Neill: It was important to get it right from the start, which is why it took such a long time to come to fruition. It is still fairly early days in its implementation; all the recommendations are still to be gone through. It was not an attempt simply to bundle up what is already being done by Departments. There was an attempt to get Departments to come on board with additional plans. The Member will be aware that an advisory stakeholder group was in place at the outset to make sure that it fed into a lot of the actions. There was a wide range of interest, and a wide range of groups came forward with ideas. This is an initial step in setting out the Executive's commitment to rural communities. We need to make sure that these are implemented in the short, medium and longer term. Although there may be some criticisms of the document, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. As I said, it is still early days. We need to see the actions implemented. I assure the House that I will continue to play my role by making sure that other Departments are held to account for what they have promised to deliver.

Rural Economy: Research and Development

3. **Ms Maeve McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the role of departmental funded research and development in assisting the rural economy. *(AQO 3387/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's vision is of a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment. I recognise the role of research and development in achieving that vision. I also recognise that a broad-ranging research programme is required if we are to succeed. The Department's evidence and innovation strategy sets out the overarching framework for research and development to underpin evidence-based policy and delivery. The outcome of research on the rural economy allows our policymaking to be based on sound scientific evidence and allows DARD to be an advocate in government for the needs of the wider rural community. We want to promote and provide guidance on the issues facing rural communities through rural proofing. I see our research and development programme as a fundamental tool to allow us to do that.

There are three funding strands in the evidence and innovation strategy: the DARD-directed research work programme at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), which has a total budget in excess of £8 million; the industry-led research through the research challenge fund, which this year will support local businesses to the value of £1 million and will enable research to a total value of £2 million to be conducted; and the Department's postgraduate research studentship scheme, which funds eight PhD students each year. In addition, we are committed to increasing the drawdown of European funding in the area of research and development. In the 2013 financial year, we will fund a Horizon 2020 facilitator post based at AFBI to ensure that we are best placed to capitalise fully on the significant EU budget in that area.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for her response, particularly the breakdown of the various themes of the fund. Will she ensure that there will be maximum drawdown from the fund, specifically to help the agrifood industry? Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. The Department participates in the Barroso task force, and I work closely with Executive colleagues to ensure that the agrifood and rural sectors fully capitalise on the available EU funding. To assist those sectors to take advantage of the Horizon 2020 funds, we will also place and fund a facilitator post based at AFBI. I hope to have someone in place by April. That postholder will work closely with the desk officers in Brussels, local research providers and industry to assist with setting up collaborative partnerships and to provide any help necessary to assist in the application process. I hope that that will lead to an increase in our drawdown. There is, obviously, an Executive commitment to draw down additional funds. This post will assist us to do that and make sure that we target it towards the agrifood sector.

2.45 pm

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister outline whether there will be any possibility of an expansion of research and development at the proposed new DARD headquarters at Ballykelly, given the prospects for employment in the catchment areas there, which include Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady and Londonderry?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that the headquarters relocation project is on target. I recognise the benefits that it has for employment in the construction industry and in the ongoing servicing of a new building in the area, and I know that it is something that the local people welcome.

As regards research and development, an additional post is not being considered at this stage. It is a great, expansive site that other Departments may look to in the future.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her answer. I welcome the investment in research and development. I am sure that she will agree that it is critical that the projects are properly evaluated. Will she tell the House how, precisely, she intends to evaluate current and future projects?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, a number of projects are ongoing; I outlined three in my initial answer. There will be independent evaluations of each of them. If he would like to receive them, I am happy to provide the Member with any evaluations and research that have been done to date. Each project will be evaluated to make sure that we get the most out of them that we can and to ensure that they represent value for money. I am happy to provide the Member in writing with the details that I have.

Flooding: South Belfast

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the findings of the Rivers Agency's investigations to identify the exact source of flooding in south Belfast in 2012. *(AQO 3388/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The storm on 27 June 2012 generated extreme rainfall in certain localised parts of greater Belfast, including south Belfast. It occurred after days of rainfall that had resulted in saturated ground and high river levels, and it caused flooding to more than 1,300 properties. Rivers Agency staff have been liaising closely with their counterparts in Roads Service and NI Water to identify where infrastructure was overwhelmed by the intensity of the rainfall and to identify what practical measures can be taken to reduce the risks of recurrence.

I am very aware of the distress and hardship caused by flooding and the concerns that house owners have had about obtaining insurance. Rivers Agency can issue a letter of comfort to residents that they could use in negotiations with insurers. That letter would set out the measures that are being taken to reduce flood risk.

As recently as 31 January, I visited the Finaghy area to see at first hand what actions are being taken to reduce any further risk of flooding and to meet residents.

Mr McGimpsey: Will the Minister assure us that the immediate remedial action that is being taken will, in fact, protect residents in the parks off the Lisburn Road, such as Sicily, Priory, Marguerite and Greystown? Can she tell the House when those remedial works are due to be completed and give comfort to the residents, who have suffered repeated flooding?

Mrs O'Neill: There are a number of issues. The incident in June last year involved heavy rainfall, and the impact that it had on residents caused a particular problem for all agencies. Each area is being dealt with on a catchment basis. In some areas, Rivers Agency and NI Water might be involved, and in others, it might be Rivers Agency and DRD. So, a number of things are being taken forward.

I know that Rivers Agency has been dealing with undesignated culverts and that it has been looking to repair some of them. Some grilles have been replaced, particularly in the Orchardville area, and we hope that that will help to alleviate flooding. A lot of minor works around Stockmans Lane have been planned. There is an additional sandbag store at Finaghy Road North. So, a number of measures have been taken forward. No one can give anyone a 100% guarantee on flooding, but we can at least work towards mitigating all the factors that contribute to flooding, which is what we are committed to doing. Rivers Agency is also committed to working with all other partners, because it is key that, in this instance in particular, the whole system was overwhelmed due to the heavy rainfall. So, DRD, Rivers Agency, the council and NI Water all have a role to play.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that much of the flooding in the Finaghy area was caused by debris in a river at Ladybrook, which, in turn, overflowed — a bridge was choked, and the river overflowed and overwhelmed the area. Will the Minister tell us what remedial works for the short term — I know that she has mentioned some of them — and what capital works for the long term are in place to ensure that this does not happen again?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, a number of pieces of work are ongoing, all on a catchment-by-catchment basis. As I said, in some areas the Rivers Agency might be working with DRD, while in others it might be working with the council. So, a number of pieces of work are being taken forward. It is important that that interagency response to the problems of flooding continues.

The system was overwhelmed in June last year, and, in the longer term, we need to take forward how the system copes. As I said, the Rivers Agency has taken its role forward in cleaning out culverts. It is also looking at the designation of culverts and has provided two new grilles, one of which is in Orchardville in south Belfast. As I said, I met residents and assured them that that would be done very quickly, and, if it is not done now, I would expect it to be done over the next week or so.

A number of works are ongoing. Other minor works are planned for the Stockmans Lane area, and some other culvert work is still to be done. As the Member will be aware, we are working closely with partners who are carrying out a major study on the future plans for the area.

Ms Lo: The Minister mentioned a number of short-term, reactive measures. Would she consider asking the Executive to look at long-term plans and see how we can upgrade the whole sewerage system in Belfast to cope with all the future changes that will be brought about by climate change?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for the question. As I said, NI Water is carrying out a major study in the area, and I think that that will expose all the failings in the present system.

You are absolutely right: flood alleviation is not a short-term initiative. You can do certain things to mitigate the flooding, but we need a longer-term plan to properly tackle major flooding problems. I am happy to have discussions with the Executive when we have the outcome of the major study of the area, and, where the Rivers Agency has a role to play, I will make sure that we are forthright in coming forward and playing our role. However, in the absence of that major study, we do not yet have the detail to go to the Executive with a proposal.

Single Farm Payments

5. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the single farm payment process this year. *(AQO 3389/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: At 4 February this year, 90% of single farm payment claims had been finalised. These figures include 910 inspection cases, and that is four times more than this stage last year. This leaves 10% of cases still to be paid. Of these, the inspection cases remaining to be processed represent about a quarter of the remaining claims. The remaining 7·5 % of cases cannot be paid immediately for various other reasons.

We are working to clear the remaining inspection cases as quickly as possible and expect that the majority of cases will be finalised by the end of May. Again, this is significantly earlier than last year, but we will continue to invest to improve this further in future years.

Looking to 2013, I am pleased to report that just under 38,000 new farm maps have now issued. As I have explained before, farmers now have an important piece of information. It is a two-way process, and we need to work together to make sure that we get those farm maps right. The 2013 single application forms are based on the new farm maps, so it is crucial that the maps and the maximum eligible area are as accurate as possible. That will obviously avoid delays in farmers getting their payments later in the year. We aim to issue 2013 single application packs issued to farmers no later than 29 March. We also plan to issue revised maps to farmers who report mapping changes.

I know that many farmers rely on receiving their single farm payment as early as possible, and I want to be able to pay them as early as possible. I am pleased to note that an early assessment of the first year of using the control with remote sensing approach to undertake on-the-spot checks in 2012 indicates that it has the potential to speed up our single farm payment control processes and payments. I will explore how we can learn from our experiences in 2012 to extend the use of control with remote sensing in 2013 and in future years.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for a detailed response. Can any other help be given to farmers to help them with their 2013 claims?

Mrs O'Neill: As I explained earlier, all DARD Direct offices will be open during the single application period to provide general advice and support to farmers in making and receipting their application. Earlier, a Member raised concerns about delays around that and in getting appointments, and I am happy to take that further and explore it.

In general, farmers can go into in DARD Direct offices and make general enquiries about their maps, entitlements, handling inspection findings and measurement of ineligible areas. They can secure amendments to maps, which will also be accepted through that period at our local offices for farmers who need to make changes. So, although farmers will once again be able to access their maps online through map viewer, this year, an additional new feature means that not only can they view the maps but they will be able to measure ineligible features, which will support them in filling out their application form. However, I again stress that this is a two-way process: I encourage farmers, when they receive their map, to get in touch with the Department and make sure that together we get this right. That, in turn, will speed up future payments.

Mr Irwin: Given that they will soon receive their 2013 IACS forms, farmers are deeply concerned over the level of inaccuracies in their new maps. Yesterday, one farmer who contacted me had 30 fields missing from his farm maps and another had 35 fields missing. In light of the unacceptably high level of mapping errors, does the Minister agree that the delivery of the maps has been diabolical, and will she update the House on how errors that cause such concern have arisen in the delivery of the maps?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not agree with the "diabolical" statement, but I assure the Member that the first two batches of maps went out and were received very positively by farmers. Now that we have had the final batch of maps sent out, we have had some positive feedback but farmers have also contacted me with concerns around missing fields. I have that under investigation, but it initially looks like it is not the result of incorrect mapping but of a systems issue. So it is something that I hope can be resolved very quickly, and my Department is working on that. I do not agree with "diabolical", but I agree that getting the maps right is a two-way process. I take seriously my role in what DARD produces, and the farmers will take their role seriously in getting it right.

Mr Rogers: Following on from the previous Member's question about farm maps, I also have lots of problems in south Down with farmers coming to me with map problems. Minister, how can the aerial photograph accommodate the hollows and the hills that we have in our land in south Down? That seems to be a major problem. I have farmers whose entitlements are reduced every year but their farm has not changed.

Mrs O'Neill: That, again, comes back to the two-way process. Those maps will not capture everything. They are an improvement on what was previously issued, and we have been improving them year on year. When I talk about a two-way process, I am actually asking a farmer to take the map that they have, walk their land and identify what is not on the map, what needs to be on it and let us get it right once and for all. That is the important message that we need to get out. As I said, it definitely has to be a two-way process. DARD is not going to have 100% accurate maps, and we will get to that stage only if we work in partnership.

Mr McNarry: On that, will the Minister explain to this layman what to say, when confronted on the issue of maps by his local farmers, about how fields go missing? Will she also explain what advice I can give to farmers about how they retrieve those fields?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to provide the Member with the guidance that we issue to farmers, which shows you how to look for ineligible features. It is things such as that that make fields appear to be missing. It comes back to the same statement: if we work in partnership, we can get maps to a very high standard. However, I am happy to share with the Member the guidance that issued. It is in quite simple language and is easy to understand. It is important that the Member familiarises himself with it for when he deals with farmers. It would, I am sure, be helpful to you and to the farmer.

Rural Development Programme

6. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current rural development programme. *(AQO 3390/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The rural development programme, with a budget of £500 million, aims to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions in rural areas throughout the North of Ireland. It brings together a wide range of support for the farming, forestry and primary processing sectors, rural enterprise, business development, diversification and rural tourism. Across farm, forestry and food businesses, improving competitiveness is encouraged through a number of measures and complementary schemes that provide support, facilitate restructuring, encourage development and foster innovation. For example, the Focus Farms programme has enabled approximately 13,000 farmers to learn, share experiences and solve common problems through discussion, farm walks and demonstrations. The Farm Family Options programme has encouraged 3,000 farm family members to increase their skills and awareness, with financial benchmarking support provided on almost 1,800 farming enterprises. To build on that, the farm modernisation programme provides capital support for the modernisation and improvement of production techniques on farm businesses. Over 2,900 farmers have already benefited, with letters of support to a further 2,500 farmers currently being issued under tranche 3. It continues to have a very positive effect on farm businesses. In addition, beyond the farm gate, the agricultural and forestry processing and marketing grant scheme has provided some £18 million investment to 78 agrifood businesses.

3.00 pm

The programme also funds farmers who manage their land for positive environmental benefit. My Department manages and delivers measures that support new woodland creation and the sustainable management of existing woodland. Agrienvironment schemes are funded by an average of £25 million each year, and, in return, 12,100 farmers are undertaking positive environmental actions that enhance our countryside. In addition, the less-favoured area compensatory scheme, which is claimed annually by some 13,500 farm businesses, results in a further £25 million entering the rural economy.

The rural development programme is making a very positive contribution and raising the quality of life in rural areas. We have over 1,300 projects being supported with grant aid of £24·9 million, which has levered in match funding of £17·1 million.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mrs O'Neill: It is all very positive.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 18/11-15] be agreed. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Mr Buchanan: In contributing to the Budget debate, I do so primarily as Deputy Chairperson of the Employment and Learning Committee — a Committee that is probably on borrowed time, but is nonetheless doing important work in areas key to our economic future. We can be in no doubt that we continue to face a very tight and challenging financial and economic environment, with little real sign of national or international recovery. In such circumstances, it is the duty of each of us to explore how best we can manage the cuts and pressures, while still doing our best to deliver high-quality services.

Lord Bannside, the former leader of my party, used to say that money talks, but the only thing that it says is "goodbye". I know that we are all aware of that nowadays, but there are people in our community who feel it very acutely and struggle to put bread on the table. It is vital that we give priority to helping those who are most vulnerable and in greatest need.

Given that we are a devolved region of the UK that is dependent on the block grant, the Budget shows the excellent job that the Finance Minister has done in allocating resources across the Departments. He deserves praise for the constructive way in which he has redistributed and reallocated resources on the basis of the various monitoring rounds and Budget realignment, rather than the continual grumbling so often levelled against him around the Chamber. We can never have enough resources. We would always like more, but we must live in the real world.

The economy is, quite rightly, at the centre of the Programme for Government, and the Department for Employment and Learning plays a key role in that. I mentioned those who struggle to make ends meet. One of the major areas of concern, one of the major problems facing our society and, indeed, one of the most serious effects of the economic downturn is growing unemployment. The figures are far too high, especially among our young people. That simply has to be tackled, and tackled robustly.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. He will no doubt remember the statement made by the Minister for Employment and Learning this morning, in which he did his best to get all young people into training, apprenticeships, etc. Does the Member not agree that it would be a criminal offence to consider doing away with such an important Department at this time?

Mr Buchanan: That will be up for discussion when the time comes.

The deployment of resources into schemes and initiatives aimed at the creation of jobs will not be a waste. If we get that right, it will be an investment that will lay the foundation of an economic recovery — a recovery that will stand a much greater chance of being robust and long-lasting. A key driver of a dynamic and substantive economic recovery is a properly educated and skilled local workforce. That is recognised by the Executive, and I especially welcome the jobs and economy initiative announced by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in November 2012. As my colleague the First Minister said at the time, the initiative:

> *"will provide a significant boost to the economy in Northern Ireland and provide employment, particularly for our young people and those who have been out of work for long periods."*

The Executive have set aside £80 million for the initiative over the next three financial years. It is reassuring that the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) will receive £1 million in 2012-13, £14 million in 2013-14 and £15 million in 2014-15 to fund a range of key schemes designed to tackle unemployment and create a workforce with the sorts of skills and education qualifications that employers are looking for today.

I do not intend to speak in detail about those schemes, but I support the Steps to Work programme. We will now be able to fund schemes in the programme that are targeted at those who are aged between 18 and 24 and those at the other end of the scale, aged 50 and over. People in those two categories find it hard to get steady employment.

First Start is targeted at those young people who have been out of work for at least 26 weeks and aims to provide them with a minimum of six months' employment in the private or public sector. That provides them with a good opportunity to add to their CV, thus helping increase their chances of getting more permanent work.

For those aged 50 and over who are out of work and find it almost impossible to get back into the workplace, the Step Ahead 50+ project will give 1,100 people in that age group a chance of temporary work in the community and voluntary sector. Again, that opportunity will hopefully enable people to get valuable experience to add to their CV.

It has often been said that if we are to attract the right sort of direct investment and encourage local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs to take risks and grow their businesses, a key ingredient must surely be the availability of a well-educated and skilled workforce. That is where higher and further education plays a vital role.

Additional funding has also ensured increased enrolments for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses and other directly relevant courses at our local universities. That is the sort of forward thinking that we need. I commend the Minister for Employment and Learning for pursuing the matter. Linked to that are the 150 additional fully funded PhD places in areas of economic relevance.

However, if we are to get the best value out of the extra funding at higher education level, we need to ensure that the right sorts of high-value-added jobs are available for students when they graduate or become PhDs. Therefore, I encourage the Minister for Employment and Learning and my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Minister Foster, to work closely on that particular issue.

I turn now to a final DEL-related issue, which is that of apprenticeships. The Minister made a helpful statement in the House yesterday, in which he announced a major review of apprenticeships and youth training.

It is vital that the review leave no stone unturned. There are problems that need to be considered and addressed. Some would-be apprentices can lack incentive and motivation, and they can also lack appropriate education standards. However, there are many other young people who are keen to avail themselves of any opportunity to learn a trade or develop a skill. I am sure that we all know of young people who are totally frustrated and will eagerly grasp any work-related opportunity.

Yesterday, the Minister referred to a "gold standard". That is what we all aspire to, and we do not want to allow red tape to get in the way. Employers who would be prepared to take on apprentices ought not to be hampered by bureaucracy, regulation or, indeed, overzealous employment law.

I will move on to other issues outside the employment and learning sphere. First, I welcome the level of capital investment that has gone into the health service in the western area. I ask the Minister of Finance and Personnel to consider in future monitoring rounds putting money into bringing forward the second phase of the Omagh hospital. As we know, the Omagh hospital was to be a single development. It was then broken down into two different phases so that the first phase could be got under way. The second phase is to be the mental health facility. I ask the Minister to look at that. It is important that that phase is brought forward in tandem with the first phase of development that is already under way.

In education, it is important that the Lisanelly land in Omagh is developed for the education campus. Unfortunately, progress seems to be very slow at the minute. School builds in the western area, especially Omagh, are of a very poor standard and need to be upgraded. Think back to a few months ago when Arvalee School was burned, requiring a newbuild on the Lisanelly site. We need to get work on that education campus moved on a lot more quickly. I ask the Minister to keep that in mind if there is any spare money in his Department.

I welcome the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) commitment of £28·6 million for the proposed gasworks in the west. That will be of extreme benefit to businesses there. I know of a number of businesses that are looking forward to tapping into that for their own benefit. I ask for that, too, to be kept on the radar.

I could go on and speak about many other issues in my constituency, but I will leave it at that. I welcome and support the Budget Bill that is before the House today.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the Budget Bill. I will, hopefully, make some constructive remarks that may well be taken on board.

As each of us is all too aware, the economy in this part of Ireland is in free fall. Private enterprise is slowly melting away, and jobs are being lost at a phenomenal rate across each of our six counties. The figures that the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) released most recently estimate that 24,945 people emigrated from the North of Ireland between the middle of 2010 and the middle of 2011. That equates to 1·4% of our total population emigrating in one year, or around 500 people leaving this state every week. Things have not got much better since those figures were calculated.

We cannot simply sit back and expect macroeconomic conditions to reverse themselves. We need to continue to take a proactive approach to address the crisis that we find ourselves in as a result of global economic factors. We need to invest the money that we are allocated in a strategic and thought-out manner to ensure that we not only achieve the challenging targets set out in the Programme for Government but so that we have a direct impact on the quality of life of all of our citizens.

It is clear that the Executive are doing their best to grow the private sector and rebalance our economy, despite the fiscal limitations facing them. Since the Assembly was first established, the primary objective has consistently been to grow the private sector and rebalance the economy. That target has not yet been achieved, and we really must ask ourselves why. What barriers are there to our achieving that objective?

In my view, there needs to be a debate around the fiscal levers that we have. To date, any attempts to start that debate have been countered with a reference to an overestimated deficit between what we contribute in taxes and what we receive to run our Administration. That price tag is always thrown out and the case for greater fiscal powers dismissed. However, little or no assessment has been made of the potential benefits. It costs nothing to have a rational debate on such a matter. We are prepared to engage in that debate. We are prepared to listen to the views of other parties and those in the community who are interested in this area. However, we would also like the debate to be sensible and approached with an open mind.

There is no doubt that our local economy has massive potential. However, that potential is being seriously hampered by the lack of an ability to control our own fiscal affairs. Decisions taken by a Government in Westminster have serious implications for us here. Not only are decisions taken that have serious implications for us, which we have no say in, but we have a complete lack of information on the levels of revenue and expenditure coming into and out of the North.

We need to see much more work done to promote greater economic planning across this island in a joined-up manner. We need to move to a position where we consider the economic realities of this island as a whole. For example, when public services are being mapped out, it needs to be done in a way that benefits citizens on both sides of the border, delivers the best possible public services for all of our people and provides maximum value for money.

3.15 pm

The border continues to act as a barrier to economic development which stifles the economic potential of all of Ireland, but particularly those along the border corridor. In my own county of Fermanagh, a number of proposals have been put forward to achieve these objectives in areas like health, education, local government and economic development. One of those proposals is a submission made by a group in north-west Fermanagh to work with Coláiste Cholmcille in Ballyshannon to deliver education

to that part of the border corridor where a school is threatened with closure as a result of low enrolment numbers. Such proposals need only a fair hearing, but they also need the support of both Governments on this island to make them happen.

We are halfway through the current budgetary period. It is a good time to assess where we have come from, where we are now and where we are going. If we did that in a serious way, we would see that we have failed to achieve the principal objective that we set ourselves. So, we need to look at alternatives to growing the private sector and rebalancing the economy, and that needs to be done in a sustainable way. We need to assess new ways of maximising the potential of the whole of this island. We cannot simply continue on this path without reviewing our progress and analysing all the options that are open to us. The game-changer is further fiscal powers. We are happy to participate in a sensible debate in that area. Is anyone here opposed to such a discussion? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr D McIlveen: I support the Budget Bill. So far, the debate has been enlightening in many ways. It was particularly enlightening to find out for the first time that my Chief Whip is a fan of 'The Godfather', which concerns me slightly: never mind horse meat, I am starting to worry about horses' heads if my voting record does not improve greatly. In all seriousness, this has been very useful. At this time of the year, it is always good to take stock of what has been happening and what the plans are for the future.

The Deputy Chair of the Committee for Finance and Personnel summed up well where the Committee is with the Budget Bill. We are not unmindful of the fact that certain Departments are experiencing unforeseen challenges. Look at the Department of Health: obviously, Transforming Your Care is putting quite a financial burden on it and will continue to do so. Obviously, the events in the past six months from a Justice point of view have put pressure on the PSNI, and the retiring prison officers' scheme has also brought a financial burden. So, we are not unmindful of the fact that there are challenges out there. As Mr Flanagan indicated, the economy and how we rebalance the economy within Northern Ireland must continue to be the focus of any Budget that we have.

I also cannot miss the opportunity, as I did in the Committee, to have a go at the European bureaucrats who have brought this predicament upon us in relation to the Titanic signature project. Let us hope that that is an issue that can be ironed out in the coming days.

What a Budget like this highlights is that each Department has a unique responsibility for balancing their books and making sure that public money is being spent in the best possible way. I am sorry that Mr McCarthy has left us, because I struggle with the argument for clinging on to Departments just for the sake of it. Listening to certain representatives, particularly in the Alliance Party, you would think that if the Department for Employment and Learning was wound up every university, every apprenticeship scheme and every possible support mechanism out there for getting people into work would disappear with it.

Nothing could be further from the truth: all we are doing is looking at where the functions can be transferred to that takes away from a burdensome, over-bureaucratic, over-expensive and unnecessary Department. That is where this whole process is going. It is about efficiencies. If we and the private sector are sending out a message to the public that we all have to do things more efficiently, we cannot be hypocritical and say that we will not be more efficient in the way in which we do things. Those are the challenges, and the line that the Alliance Party has taken is very disappointing because it shows a complete detachment from the reality of what the public expect and want in that they want this place to run in a much more efficient way.

I also take a particular interest in Mr Flanagan's comments on greater fiscal responsibility. Of course I agree with that, and I still strongly advocate the devolution of corporation tax to the Assembly. However, with that power comes responsibility, and when we see Sinn Féin's approach in Belfast City Council over the proposed reduction in rates to help struggling businesses through this difficult time, perhaps the jury is still out on devolving that fiscal responsibility. That said, Departments cannot blame the Minister of Finance and Personnel for all their shortcomings and struggles, and there has to be a continued focus on how we make our Budget go that little bit further.

Reform of the public sector has to be one way to do that. Unfortunately, we now find ourselves in a position across the United Kingdom whereby the public sector is shrinking, and the financial rewards of being in the public sector are shrinking to the point at which trainees in some police forces in England get smaller salaries than trainees in a leading fast food restaurant. That is an example of the way in which the public sector is having to stretch its budgets further and further, which will, for the foreseeable future, continue to be the case. Northern Ireland will have to face up to that because while 23·5% of jobs in Scotland are in the public sector, here it is nearly 30%. That obviously has a knock-on effect at subcontractor level, which can then have a ripple effect. Our dependence on the public sector is excessive, so we have to continue to work with the private sector and try to incentivise it as much as possible to encourage further investment in business and create jobs.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: Yes, I will.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you very much. I will be very brief. You referenced the size of the public sector vis-à-vis other regions. Does the Member not agree that the public sector here does, in fact, compare favourably, particularly in its efficiency, with other regions and that the issue that distinguishes us here is that the private sector is floundering and is too small?

Mr D McIlveen: I agree to an extent with what the Member said, but I am not sure that I agree with the way he said it. We have to accept that, if the public sector is to shrink, which is something that I am keen to explore, we have to make sure that it shrinks at the same rate as the private sector grows because the jobs that will have to be moved from one sector to another would have to be found elsewhere. Therefore, we have to continue along the road of incentivisation and decide how we encourage that direct investment in Northern Ireland.

We are not in a position economically in which any of us should give ourselves a pat on the back. That said, we have to accept the benefits that devolution has brought. Regular trade missions, for example, go out on behalf

of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Minister of Finance and Personnel to encourage businesses to come and invest in Northern Ireland and to have their UK base here. We cannot ignore the fact that Belfast and Northern Ireland are considered the second most favourable location for foreign direct investment, being second only to the City of London. That is an incredible achievement in a relatively short period of time of devolution.

So, we have to accept that we are making progress, and, obviously, there are still huge economic challenges out there that we cannot ignore. However, I believe that this devolved Assembly's work has to be ongoing, it has to continue to face up to those challenges and it certainly has to continue to deliver. I pay tribute to Invest Northern Ireland under the leadership of Alastair Hamilton, as it now has a proven track record of encouraging businesses to invest in Northern Ireland. I think that it is right and proper that we do that.

Moving on to talk about the Department for Social Development's (DSD) budget, I will be parochial on this subject. I certainly appreciate the investment that has come to Ballymena through the Minister for Social Development for, first, social housing at St Patrick's Barracks. That was long needed and is very welcome. We are looking forward to seeing the Fold Housing Association under the support of the Department for Social Development get this project fully under way so that the housing shortage in the Ballymena area can be dealt with.

Secondly, we are also very encouraged by the £4 million investment that will go into the Ballymena area to try to regenerate the approaches into the town. That is very welcome, and we look forward to welcoming Minister McCausland after inviting him to come to Ballymena to launch that particular scheme. We left that with him. We told him that he was very welcome to come to Ballymena any time that he wants, as long as he makes the same announcement for more money to come into the town. It has been very much needed, and, hopefully, that money will be well spent on generating more business and getting more custom to come in from across the Province as we look to tidying up the town in that area.

I support the Bill in its entirety. The weight of expectation of how the money will be spent is probably on the Minister of Finance and Personnel's shoulders. However, my point is that it should not be solely on his shoulders — the mantle has been passed to each Department. You have your budget, so you need to go out and spend that money as effectively as possible. We welcome that 22 schools have received a collective spend of around £220 million. That was a very positive announcement, and we hope that similar announcements will come from the Department of Education. That is where the Committee is with that issue. I commend this Budget to the House.

Mrs Overend: As we heard, this stage of the budgetary process is important, as it gives legislative effect to the spring Supplementary Estimates and the Vote on Account, which the Assembly debated yesterday. Despite voting against the 2011-15 four-year Budget, my party is content to let this stage pass so that Departments' ability to draw down resources is not jeopardised.

As my party's spokesperson in this area, I will take this opportunity to look specifically at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's budget. The Minister will be aware that a significant proportion of the DETI budget is transferred to the economic development agency, Invest NI, for the purposes of growing our economy. That is one of the most essential tasks that any government-linked body carries out, and, allied with the organisation's significant spend, it is clearly important that it demonstrates strong performance in economic development.

To give some perspective on the vast figures that are involved, Invest NI's net provision in 2012-13 was just under £144 million. In short, we need more clarity so that we can reach a conclusion on the job that Invest NI is doing.

I would like to see clearly defined the numbers of jobs and the amounts of investment promised at the outset and those which actually materialised. Further to that, I would also like more certainty around the extent to which jobs created are counterbalanced by jobs lost, as well as more specific data on job quality. Only then will we have a true picture of the performance of that agency. It is once again disappointing that Invest NI has once again registered a substantial reduced requirement of over £20 million. We must look at the budget flexibility open to it in order to address that.

3.30 pm

Tourism, as a key driver of the economy, must also demonstrate a strong return on money invested by government. I would be the first to admit that much good work has taken place in this area, and I give credit where it is due. I think particularly of the successes: the new Titanic Belfast building, the Irish Open and the preparations for the UK City of Culture. However, when we consider that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) received over £25 million, Tourism Ireland over £15 million and InterTradeIreland over £3 million — as well as £470,000 under the vague heading of "development of tourism" — it is clear that we should expect results.

The Minister will agree that some of the statistics did not bear out the successes for which we had initially hoped, and I think specifically of the disappointing drop in the numbers of visitors from Great Britain, which are down 15% on last year. That is despite the not-insignificant budgets provided to NITB and Tourism Ireland for the NI 2012 campaign. I hope that we can learn from some of the mistakes and have a successful World Police and Fire Games and UK City of Culture year, and the imminent publication of a long-overdue tourism action plan will, I hope, help in that regard. However, I would prefer it if the plan were fully costed.

I am sure that the Minister will agree that Northern Ireland-specific economic research is fundamentally important as we seek to implement policies to make best use of our economic potential, and that is the next area of the DETI budget that I wish to deal with.

The area of economic development policy and research was given just under £15 million in 2012-13, and I would welcome clarification on how that is broken down. The work of the economic advisory group is important in this regard, but I ask the Minister whether we are drawing on enough expertise that is independent of government. In making this point, I think specifically of the merger

involving the Northern Ireland Research Centre and the loss of experience as a consequence.

On the specific point of childcare, I believe that the provision of affordable and effective childcare is an economic driver, and I welcome the fancy words used to recognise its importance. However, I must say that I am disappointed that there is yet another delay in launching a childcare strategy, and I seek assurances that the finance will be dedicated to addressing this real issue.

I conclude by reiterating what many in this House said today and yesterday: the budgetary process needs more clarity. It is disjointed and does not have the necessary transparency to provide proper scrutiny. I know that the Minister shares my frustrations, as he has said as much in the past, and it really is time that the review of the financial process was fully implemented.

Mrs McKevitt: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill. It is so important for all of us in this House to understand the impact that our budgetary decisions have on families, individuals, communities, organisations, charities, sports clubs, companies and farmers, etc, at a time when money is scarce. It is critical that the health and safety, education, housing need, job prospects and well-being of all our citizens are prioritised. However, there is also a duty on us to ensure that due proportionality gives a fair distribution of finances across all Departments, so that services can be delivered equally.

I am neither a financial guru nor an economist, but I have enough understanding to know that, behind every plus and minus sign on the Budget sheet, there is a story to be told. I have some real concerns about underspending in a number of Departments. Millions of pounds planned to be spent in this financial year will be returned for a variety of reasons, be it procurement procedures, poor planning or inefficiency within Departments. The bottom line is that a number of planned projects will not now happen.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for giving way. We talked yesterday about the number of underspends in different Departments. If you look at OFMDFM, you will see that no money has been spent to date through the strategic investment fund, there is no childcare action plan and many of the regeneration sites are still behind schedule. Does the Member agree that those underspends are not so much about financial good management in the Department but more about bad administration by government? More and more projects are not delivered because that money is being sent back to the centre.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with him. With better planning in the future, those projects could be delivered.

I register my concern about the amount of money that is being spent by each Department on services provided by consultants, particularly when we hear about the refusal of European funds for projects such as the Peace Bridge and the Titanic Quarter.

As a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I welcome the overall £7 million increase to the Department. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) has the smallest budget of all Departments — less than 1% of the overall Budget — yet it has such an important role to play in the provision of and access to our arts, culture, leisure and sports. I will continue to argue that that Department is worthy of a bigger share of our Budget. Imagine, Minister, if your home budget limited your leisure, sport, art and tourism spend to less than 1%. My colleague Dominic Bradley reckons that you could not afford to go to the cinema if that were the case.

On the brighter side, the additional money for the arts and Northern Ireland Screen are very welcome and will go some way to alleviate the difficulties in those areas. The small lift to the World Police and Fire Games is also welcome, but the news that Ravenhill is unavailable for the games is more than disappointing. This is the premier flagship project of 2013, and it is important that we get it right. That first impression will last.

With competitors and visitors already making travel arrangements for the games, it is critical that venues are tied down quickly. With Ravenhill and Casement Park ruled out for the opening ceremony, I am delighted that the organising committee is taking a serious look at the generous offer made by Newry and Mourne District Council to consider Pairc Esler in Newry. Hopefully, this preferred opening ceremony venue will be announced in a couple of weeks. I hope that the revenue from the games will come to fruition and enhance the investment made by the House.

Mr Gardiner: On 10 February, the Minister of Finance and Personnel said:

> *"Despite the reduction in the Public Expenditure available we are continuing to make the Health Service a key priority and providing a better Budget settlement than in either Scotland or Wales."*

I welcome that, and I thank the Minister personally for the interest that he is taking in the health service in Northern Ireland.

Can he define exactly how the settlement here is better than that in Scotland and Wales, and why is England excluded from the list? Is it better funded than Northern Ireland, or is it on a pro rata basis? Is he comparing like with like? Is it possible to compare an area as small as Northern Ireland with a population of 1·8 million to an area the size of Scotland, which has a population of 5·2 million — nearly three times as large? Surely, there are economies of scale possible in a large area like Scotland that are, quite simply, impossible here in the small area of Northern Ireland. So, is it not bound to be the case that the health service budgetary settlement here, which might look better, has always got to be better pro rata if we are to offer the full range of health services in a small province where economics of scale are impossible compared to Scotland?

I say that because any Finance Minister is going to have to fund any Health Minister here better on a pro rata basis than some other areas simply because of the lack of economies of scale.

The Minister said:

> *"even in the most difficult financial situation, the Executive have agreed to afford a degree of protection to the health budget."*

I welcome that. He went on to say:

> *"That is why we have ring-fenced and put in place full protection for the health element of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)*

budget. Indeed, when factoring in the efficiency targets and service reductions that will apply in other UK regions, I would suggest that the Health Service in Northern Ireland has received the most beneficial settlement anywhere in the UK." [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p180, col 2].

Will the Minister define exactly how far he has gone to meet the Health Minister's requirements for the health elements in his Budget? What level of efficiencies is he looking for from the Health Minister, and has he suggested where those efficiencies might be achieved? The Minister also said in his recent statement:

"As a result of our investment, many key projects will be able to proceed over the Budget period. They include the new police and Fire and Rescue Service training centre, the Altnagelvin Area Hospital radiotherapy centre, and the sports stadiums and water and sewerage network upgrades." [Official Report, Bound Volume 59, p181, col 1].

I note that only one of the infrastructure schemes that he mentioned is health related, and that is Altnagelvin Hospital's radiotherapy centre.

Will the Minister define how much each of the investments that he mentioned will cost? The Minister speaks of capital projects being taken forward over the next four years, with spending in that area being well above the long-term trend. How much is health getting as a percentage of the total infrastructure investment by the Executive? How does the cash investment in health compare with the cash being spent on sports stadiums, for example? I look forward to the Minister's response, and I hope that it is worthwhile.

Mr McCallister: We must be coming to the end of the Budget debate if I am being called to speak. Today's debate has raised some interesting points. I would like to build on some of the issues that colleagues brought up. Mr Cree and Mrs Overend said that we need to look again at how we reform the Budget process, keep movement going and bring more transparency. I know that it has been a long-standing hobby horse of Mr Cree, and I am sure that he will continue to raise it with the Minister here and at Committee.

Mrs Overend talked about other economic drivers. There has been disappointment in the tourism industry, and it is important to draw Members' attention to the fact that 2012 was to be Our Time Our Place. Despite a huge marketing plan, the numbers did not stack up. There was a very difficult period in December, but, even much earlier in the year, we just did not break through into some of those markets. There were some successes, and Mrs Overend mentioned the success of the Titanic project.

I would like to draw the Minister's attention to some of the issues that have come up. Will he comment on where we are on the equal pay claim and the £30 million increase? How will he resolve that, and what changes will it make to the Budget? He also outlines in the Bill the superannuation and other allowances that relate to expenditure on pensions, lump sums, tax and gratuities in the Civil Service pension scheme. That is shown in the Budget as a decrease of over £234 million in the net cash requirement. I understand that this has occurred mostly through the movement of working capital. I would appreciate a slightly more detailed explanation from the Minister on that specific issue.

There is an element of European funding coming into DFP, and the Budget shows that with reference to EU Peace programmes, EU community initiatives and the European regional development fund. Will the Minister outline how that sits alongside the Programme for Government commitments to increase the drawdown of European funds by 20% and whether his Department is maximising the European funding available to it? His colleague Mr McIlveen seemed to be laying the blame for the Titanic centre funding at the door of Europe. It is fair to say that the jury is probably still out on who is responsible.

3.45 pm

Given the size of the education budget, we need to have more clarity in education. We constantly hear from colleagues who sit on the Committee for Education about the difficulties that they have in getting that clarity. I would be interested to know whether the Minister of Finance and Personnel thinks it acceptable that the Minister of Education has not shared his savings delivery plan like other Departments. Transparency is needed, and there is no good reason for the secrecy from that Department.

Will the Minister of Finance and Personnel assure the House that he will speak with the Minister of Education and deal with him at Executive level to see how we can bring more transparency to this? It is difficult and frustrating for a Committee to try to scrutinise and hold a Department to account when it is not given the relevant information.

I have a couple of concerns about the budgeting for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The use of consultants has cost some £870,000. If we break that figure down, we can look as some examples of spending: £45,000 on ESA delivery models and location options; £65,000 on an assignment to find an ESA programme manager; and over £12,000 to determine the terms and conditions of ESA directors. The question must be asked whether all of that is absolutely necessary.

We are led to believe that ESA is about driving efficiencies and saving money. However, in his response to an Assembly question from my colleague Danny Kinahan, the Minister said that he has not budgeted for the new organisation. Therefore, as things stand, we do not know whether it will save money. However, I offer this to the Finance Minister: if an organisation employs over 60,000 people, it is unlikely to be cheap. With an organisation of such sheer size and scale, is it not time, when the legislation is progressing through the House, that we started to look at budgets and at what the scale of such an organisation is likely to be?

Mr Flanagan spoke about cross-border co-operation. I do not think that anyone ever stood in the way of that which made sense, whether that be building a road or — I see that Minister Poots is in the Chamber — looking at how we deliver cardiac services for children. Everyone in the House has been proactive about that.

Even if we do not agree on the exact subvention from Westminster, we know that it is very large. We can debate whether it is £8 billion, £9 billion or £10 billion, but it is huge. Whether the Minister continues to campaign for and champion tax-varying powers, I imagine, knowing him and his party's philosophy, that tax-varying powers are unlikely

to mean a reduction for anyone. They are likely to be tax-raising powers.

Mr Hamilton: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Certainly.

Mr Hamilton: Thank you. Will the Member agree that, given the fiscal deficit that he mentioned, regardless of whether one disputes its size, taxes in Northern Ireland would by definition have to go up to meet at least the current standard of public services that people have come to expect?

Mr McCallister: I certainly agree with that. You cannot continue to argue that you want even higher levels of spending and expect that, if you devolve tax-varying powers, taxes are going to be reduced. Without being too unkind, there is a slight air of fantasy from the Member and Sinn Féin on that.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. He said that the deficit — or subvention, as he called it — is £8 billion or £9 billion or £10 billion, but we do not have a figure at all. We have an overestimated figure that nobody can stand over; a figure that is based on flawed estimates and that contains figures that, by the Treasury's own admission, are not overseen by either the Executive or the British Secretary of State. That figure tells us very little. It is not based on fact; it is based on estimates. We need to properly debate the fiscal arrangements that we have. The British Government need to give us accurate figures. Placing a price tag up front in the debate is not helpful. When talking about a potential deficit, we need to have proper figures.

I return to the Member's comments about taxation policy. Any taxation policy, if we did have greater fiscal powers here, would not simply be dictated by Sinn Féin. It would have to be done with the collective agreement of the Executive.

Mr McCallister: I thank the Member for that intervention. Given the fact that he is not able to give even his estimate of the figure, does he at least accept that, however accurate the estimate is, it is a large figure? I gave the example, which he quoted, of £8 billion, £9 billion or £10 billion. Maybe the Minister can give his best guess when he is summing up the debate. However, the figure is substantial, and that is what we have to get across. I do not have an issue with it being a substantial figure. I think that, living in the United Kingdom, we have a collective duty to help worse-off regions in our nation. Northern Ireland happens to be a worse-off part of the UK, so it is right and proper that we get some help from our friends across the rest of the country.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: Go ahead, Mitchel.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Always glad to help, John. Thank you very much for giving way. Do you agree that an argument over estimates is, by itself, very unlikely to give us a definitive answer? Our call, which we think most parties that want definitive answers would support, is to give us the information and let us make our own minds up.

Mr McCallister: I notice that Sinn Féin has not given us a definitive answer yet. Perhaps its Members should get the number crunchers behind the scenes in Sinn Féin to try to come up with a definitive answer. Does he accept that the figure is very large indeed, and that we are very fortunate to be part of the UK and have that subvention and support from the rest of the country?

Mr Rogers: I welcome the Second Stage of the Budget Bill, which presents an opportunity to offer my opinion on some aspects of the planned spending. I have listened to the Minister. Today is not about lambasting the Minister, and I promise him that the purpose of my comments is purely to reflect on whether we have got our priorities right and, perhaps, to influence how, in the future, we allocate scarce public resources.

As a former teacher, I note with satisfaction that the Youth Service is getting an additional £755,000 to promote the personal and social development of children and young people, and assist them in gaining the knowledge, skills and experience to reach their full potential as valued individuals. Through community relations measures for young people, that will encourage the development of mutual understanding and promote recognition of and respect for cultural diversity. I welcome that, and hope that the additional money will help in focusing on the need to generate genuine understanding of the need to respect difference and encourage diversity. Recent events on the streets of Northern Ireland remind us that much needs to be done to bring an end to the mistrust, lack of self-esteem and inability of many young people to engage positively with others from a different background.

The total Youth Service budget of over £37 million is money that I hope is used in the most effective way and shared fairly across the North, particularly in rural areas, where opportunities for engagement are limited. In rural areas, we do not have peace walls, but I remind Members that peace walls do not have to be made of concrete or corrugated metal. They can exist in the minds of people, and that is equally sad.

I would like to focus on a few issues in education and highlight the fact that sound financial planning for education and raising standards are inextricably linked. The original idea behind ESA was commendable: reduce bureaucracy and deliver more resource to the classroom. As a school leader back in those days, I was encouraged by that, but like many others today, I have severe reservations.

Really what I am saying is that it causes me great concern that the Department has not yet got an up-to-date business case, and ESA could be up and running in a few months. I do not think that that would be acceptable if I were looking for a business loan. Although you are not responsible, Minister, how will your Department address that issue? Because, in two months' time, we will be in the next financial year.

School maintenance and newbuilds: there are major issues with school maintenance, with a £200 million backlog, and there is a list of promised newbuilds still waiting to cut the first sod. What a boost that would be to our construction industry, if only it could be prioritised. That, in turn, would increase the spending power of the shopper and help us to reinvigorate our local economy.

In response to a question for written answer a few weeks ago, I was astounded to hear that over 270 primary schools have class sizes of 30 and that 17 schools have class sizes of 35. There are major issues here that need to be addressed if we are really serious about raising

standards and giving our young teachers some worthwhile employment.

Our teachers do fantastic work, but meeting the needs of 30 or more children with diverse learning needs requires special attention. Many of our classrooms cannot even physically accommodate such classes. I was delighted to attend an event in Stranmillis last week with other colleagues from the Assembly and to meet many young people. We really need a scheme where our newly qualified teachers are guaranteed a year's employment to complete their early professional development.

I question the scheme by OFMDFM to employ 200 teachers to promote one-to-one support for literacy and numeracy schemes. That seems like a good idea, but is it a one-off or an integral part of some strategy to raise standards? Is it sound financial planning, or planning on the hoof?

As we move forward, sound financial planning will be integral to raising standards. Our school leaders are expected to have a school development plan that is closely linked to a three-year financial plan. If there is a change to common formula funding, that will affect a school's budget. How can school leaders plan ahead if we continue to have the seasonal adjustment that the education sector experiences? ESA could be that opportunity, but where is the up-to-date business case? I will move on.

I was surprised to learn that over £15 million has been cut from the Department for Regional Development's budget. That concerns me, as less money is being provided for high-quality water and sewerage services. I am aware that many small sewerage plants in rural areas need to be replaced or upgraded in order to comply with European legislation, and I worry that we may arrive at a situation where we incur infraction penalties.

Again, in the same Department, remaining with environmental issues, I note that there is no provision for future plans for the electrification of our rail network. Yes, I acknowledge that much work has been done in recent times — and I am particularly pleased that refurbishment work on the Belfast-Derry railway line is ahead of schedule. That is good news, but our rolling stock on the Belfast-Dublin railway line needs replenished.

In recent years, there has been considerable progress in reducing death on our roads. I am mindful of the young police constable who lost her life at the weekend, and other families who have lost loved ones in recent times. However, the overall reduction in death on the roads is major and welcome. The additional £6 million for the Department of the Environment, which I hope will be invested in infrastructure designed to reduce further death on our roads, is welcome.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the Audit Office. I welcome the good news that no change is proposed to its budget of over £8 million. I also welcome the Minister's undertaking to acknowledge the independence of the Audit Office in carrying out its statutory role and the fact that he considers the Audit Office's role to be well-defined by statute and not to require any further attention by his Department in providing clarity. I accept that, and I feel that I can now relax in the knowledge that the Audit Office will be free to carry out its vital work without any interference, other than from the Audit Committee, which has sole responsibility for agreeing its budget.

4.00 pm

I note the reduction in the budget of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and surmise that it is not related to the fact that substantial money was returned by that organisation in recent times. In recent weeks, I have had the privilege of attending the opening of a new fire station at Rathfriland. I know that many other fire stations around the North need similar facilities. I look forward to that.

Two months ago, the Assembly passed a motion on the Narrow Water bridge. After that debate, the Minister assured me that a decision would be made once his officials had scrutinised all the necessary documents. I know that they have been working closely with the other parties involved in the application. I say this to the Minister: south Down — in fact, Northern Ireland — cannot afford to lose a £20 million project for an Executive input of less than £2 million. Our construction and tourism industries need that action.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the DARD budget today. The DARD budget is the budget that, perhaps, has the greatest impact on our major economic industry: the agrifood industry. High above the Senate Chamber, there are three images depicting Northern Ireland's three greatest industries: shipbuilding; the textile industry; and agriculture. Of those three, agriculture is our sole remaining major local industry. It is, therefore, beholden on the House to ensure that our farmers and the wider industry receive every possible support. Just like all businesses operating to a budget, Departments are not and should not be immune to budgetary constraints on their activities. That is what makes the DARD budget so critical to the Northern Ireland economy as a whole.

Looking back at the past year, the focus of the DARD budget should have been to achieve the maximum economic return for this industry and for our economy as a whole. Last year was a tough year for farmers. I believe that everyone in the House can agree on that point. It was a year in which the farmers deserved greater support and assistance from the Department, the primary aim of which should be to support the future of the industry. However, the Agriculture Minister has said that she hopes that next year will be better for farmers. I am sure that the Finance Minister would agree that Ministers should strategically plan their budgets to deliver help, not hope. A Minister who was confident in their future planning and the direction of their Department in the past and into the future would never offer mere hope. That suggests misdirected priorities and wasted resources. Farmers, their families and all those employed directly and indirectly in the industry will not thank the Minister and her Department for the consequences of failing to plan strategically, something that is suggested by the significantly reduced net and cash requirements for the 2012-13 budget.

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

More recently, the Agriculture Minister has told us that she is showing leadership, as she moved ahead of her Department in making the decision to relocate her headquarters to Ballykelly. During the past year, however, farmers have been calling on the Minister to step forward and take decisive action to deliver help on the issues that are important on each and every farm in Northern Ireland. I am sure that the Finance Minister, given his keen interest in agriculture, will share their concerns, as I list their

issues: slurry spreading; fairer pricing; rising feed prices; rising rural crime; rising energy costs; and, of course, the potential long-term damage of the horse meat scandal. An issue that is critical to the future of the industry is the forging of strong links among all elements of the food production chain.

Within last year's budget, the Minister had a duty to address all those points in detail, but the performance has been poor, at best. For far too long, successive Ministers have failed in their responsibility and duty to work towards returning profitability and stability to the industry, an industry that, during that period and to this day, continues to offer reduced returns for harder work. Despite all the money and resources received, DARD has continually failed to come up with the goods. That cannot go on indefinitely with no end in sight.

One major area of concern is the continued failure of the Rivers Agency to stem the tide of flooding. Despite a significant increase in resources for the Rivers Agency and flood protection, DARD is still broadly failing to tackle flooding. Does the Finance Minister agree that, in 2012, it is wholly unacceptable for people living in Northern Ireland to continue to have their life disrupted and put on hold because of flooding? The Agriculture Minister has failed to get a grip on the issue despite increased resources. A fundamental review of the Rivers Agency and effective increased funding may well be required to help to plan for the future. Solutions are urgently needed, but DARD does not appear to be in a position to offer them. Minister, that must change.

Another area in which increased resources in the Budget appear to have offered little in the way of positive results is the significant increase of £4 million to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI). The Minister continues to receive expensive research results or, in the case of the County Down biosecurity study, continues to wait for expensive research results. Yet, she fails to act on the advice received. The Minister must listen to the expert advice that she is paying dearly for from her budget. There are countless examples of where the breadth of knowledge of AFBI is continually ignored in favour of Department dogma. The increase in research funding is to be expected from a Department that likes to research an issue to death without taking any action whatsoever to resolve the problem. The too-long-debated issue of bovine TB is only one of many examples.

As we look in detail at the DARD budget and its future priorities, we must never forget the family budgets in farms across Northern Ireland. Provisional figures released by DARD show that the total income from farming in Northern Ireland is down by 52·2% in real terms, from £290 million in 2011 to £143 million in 2012. The situation is not helped by an Agriculture Department that, over the past year and looking to the future, shows a cavalier indifference to the plight of the farmer. That will have a devastating effect on farmers and their families all across Northern Ireland. Although the Agriculture Minister confirms her concern and disappointment, she must share responsibility for the drastic drop in farm incomes. Despite a relatively healthy budget allocation, the Minister's Department continues to take action that only heaps added pressure on an industry already at breaking point. Does the Finance Minister agree that support and action are urgently needed, not further prevarication, expensive research, misdirected priorities and silence? The Agriculture Minister must look outside the walls of her Department and visit farms, farmers and their families.

One area that continues to perform well across the Budget period is the healthy enrolment numbers at the CAFRE campuses, which are at an all-time high. That proves that more and more people want to learn about farming. They are studying to enter the industry, which is healthy and is to be warmly welcomed. It is, therefore, all the more important that DARD prioritise support for our farms to enable them to modernise, grow and provide the future for young farmers and their families. The investment in their future through CAFRE must not be in vain or there will be no industry left for them once they finish their education. DARD has a responsibility and duty to direct its efforts and resources to ensuring that we have an industry that is ready and available to young farmers to take up the reins when their time comes.

Sadly, news of falling farm income shows that successive Ministers and the Department have resolutely failed. My fear is that the news of falling incomes will not act as a magnet but will actively deflect people from choosing farming as a career in the first place. During the Budget period, DARD missed the opportunity to help an industry in which statistics now prove that incomes are falling. The Minister must review her priorities and look again at the real world of farming across Northern Ireland. Farmers wanted a change in direction from a Department that has a track record of continually feeding the bureaucratic machine. They are calling for help to sustain the future of their industry. For far too long their calls have gone unanswered.

I hope that the Finance Minister will commit to doing all in his power to ensure that DARD meets its basic requirements on the headquarters relocation. I would welcome your assurance, Minister, that you will ensure the continued pursuit of good budgetary planning as opposed to ideologically and politically driven decisions. I look forward to June's debate, in which we will all have the opportunity to scrutinise and debate the issues of the headquarters in detail. That debate will surely provide much animation in the House.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Budget today, and I urge the Finance Minister to closely monitor the Department of Agriculture, if we are to avoid future falls in farming incomes across Northern Ireland. We must never allow our one remaining major industry to go the same way as shipbuilding and the textile industry. The House owes that to Northern Ireland.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. At the outset, I take the opportunity to apologise to the Minister and to other Members who have taken part in the debate for not being here earlier. I was dealing with issues that have probably been in the media all day today. I just want to apologise genuinely to the Minister. Budgets are a big issue, and, if we are serious about getting things right, we need to ensure that money is spent properly and goes to Departments so that they can plan ahead and deal with relevant issues. I am aware that other Members have raised issues on the Budget, especially the budget allocated to health. So, I want to take the opportunity to address the House on some points as the Chair of that Committee, and I thank the Minister for giving us the opportunity to take part in the debate today.

I acknowledge that health and the Department of Health receive a substantial amount of money. It gets a substantial allocation in the Budget round, and I take it on board that the Health Department is entitled, through the monitoring rounds, to access additional money at that time. That is to be welcomed. We need to balance that — this is not about starting another debate — with the question of whether it is enough, given the issues that the health service faces. I know that there have been issues of efficiency and efficiency savings in all Departments, but that is especially the case with health and social services and the number of trusts etc. So, to streamline the money that is going into the health and social care budget, we need to ensure that the majority if not all of it is spent on front line services. We need to ensure that, by the time that that money goes through the system, each pound that is being allocated to front line services is not diluted.

Looking to 2013-14, the Committee is well aware that the Health Department is facing a difficult year. As other Members have said, there will be budget pressures. A number of weeks ago, we heard from officials on this matter, and we were able to probe some of the details and figures that they gave us. The Committee still has some questions, because we are still waiting for figures coming from the Department so that we can compare them with figures on other issues. So, it was a concern for the Committee, but we are doing our job as a Committee and are scrutinising and ensuring that the Health Department spends the money properly.

"Transforming Your Care" is the new buzzword, and we all hear it. It is the new buzzword, especially in the health sector, and we are told that it will radically change the way in which health services are approached and delivered over the next number of years. The vision of Transforming Your Care needs to be welcomed. I do not think that anybody could argue against that vision, but there are genuine concerns out there that some parts of Transforming Your Care can dilute services and allow for the privatisation of some services. We need to raise those issues. As I said, no one could argue against the vision of Transforming Your Care, and, if we get it right, it can work.

4.15 pm

We talk about a collective, joined-up approach from Departments on some of the issues, but one of the issues that struck me was the Minister of Social Development's acceptance and admission, when answering a question a number of weeks ago in the House, that he is failing in his duty to build the amount of supported living accommodation that he committed to building under the Bamford recommendations. That is not the Health Department's issue; it is an issue for the Department for Social Development, but the Department of Health has to pick it up.

The Committee was told that the transitional funding for implementing Transforming Your Care had not yet been identified for 2013-14. So, we are talking about Transforming Your Care taking us forward over the next few years, yet the transitional funding to do that has not been identified. That is a concern.

Minister, there is also the matter of pay freezes. I know that this is probably on your radar and that you and others will probably have raised it. The pay freeze will be lifted, and we need to ensure that more money is found for salaries. Day and daily, we hear about new drugs and vaccines becoming available, and the Department will want to look carefully at them and their affordability. Not a day goes by without somebody facing the issue of how, whatever illness they have, they can access the drugs. Money then becomes the issue. Credit where credit is due, in fairness, a number of months ago the Minister of Health was able to find money to allow people to access some of the drugs associated with cancers. The world changes, access to drugs changes, new vaccines come on the market, and then there is another battle. If we are serious about the health of our people, we need to ensure that they can access some of those drugs and vaccines on a daily basis. There are difficult decisions ahead for the Department on how it chooses to spend its budget in 2013-14.

From the conversations that we have had in Committee, I assume that the Department will put pressure on the health and social care trusts to spend a greater proportion of their budget on health promotion and disease prevention. The out-turn figures for 2011-12 were put before the Committee a few weeks ago, and we were disappointed to learn that the trust spend on health promotion had dropped from 1·6% in 2008-09 to 1·4% in 2011-12. That takes me back to my point about investing for health, Transforming Your Care, health promotion, early intervention and tackling health inequalities. The money being spent by trusts on health promotion will drop next year. We need to have a common-sense approach, rather than saying one thing in one document and something else in another.

Suicide is a curse on all our communities, and it knows no boundaries. Suicide affects every home and every constituency, and it saddens me to say that it is probably the biggest killer. The rates for those who succeed in taking their own life have increased 100% over the past 10 years. Something is wrong. I have talked about Transforming Your Care, health promotion and the trust spend going down. What surprises me is that, while the suicide rate is increasing, the spend on mental health services by trusts has fallen from 7·5% of their overall budget to 7% over the past four years. Currently, it is around £227 million a year. I cannot balance that. Suicide is one of the biggest killers and is increasing, yet the spend on mental health by trusts is falling. For the record, Bamford recommended that the budget for mental health be increased to £400 million, yet we spend £227 million on mental health issues. So we would like to see the 2013-14 spending plans move towards that goal.

More generally, the Committee hopes that the Department will be able to sort out its own finances for 2013-14 as soon as possible, so that we can look at that. We hope to see those plans early in the new financial year and, in fairness, I am hopeful that that will be the case. However, if we are serious about it, it needs to be recognised that tackling health inequalities is not just a health issue. If we are talking about getting in there with early intervention, we need to be serious about tackling areas of social need. We need to be serious about getting into areas of high health inequalities. We need to ensure that we have proper education, resources, access to services and investment because, at the end of the day, they will benefit health.

Who knows? It may be that, 10 years from now, we will not need the substantial budget that we have for health because we are getting in there to intervene at an early

age. It is important that, in looking at the Budget, we do not go into our own silo and try to get money for this or that Department. I say on behalf of the Health Committee that, if we are serious about tackling the whole issue of health, including health inequalities, health promotion, early intervention and prevention, every Department needs to play its part.

Mr Wilson: I first thank the Members who remain in the Chamber. Quite clearly, after raising their points, many Members were dead keen to get a response to them — maybe by remote control or something, I do not know — but they seem to have deserted the place. Maybe they will read Hansard tomorrow. Anyhow, I thank Members for their contributions today. Some were relevant, some not so relevant, and some were fairly predictable. People would like to see lots more money spent, but there were not too many ideas about where we would save that money. That, I suppose, is the nature of these debates. I thank all the Members who took part in the debate and the Committee for accepting that the Bill should go through by accelerated passage. Mr Bradley accepted on behalf of the Committee that it had had the opportunity to scrutinise the Bill. Of course, officials have always been and always will be helpful in pursuing issues that the Committee wishes to raise because of the shortened nature of our debate on the Bill as a result of the legislative timetable.

Members raised a number of issues, and I will try to cover as many of them as possible. First, a number talked about the importance of Budget planning. We are in the third year of a four-year Budget. It showed a degree of maturity by the Executive and Assembly that we agreed a four-year Budget. We outlined the hard choices and put those to the public. We did not try to hide behind an approach of saying, "Well, we will tell you what it is like this year, and, at the end of this year, you will find out what it will be like next year". Rather, we put those choices to the public. Furthermore, this place gets an awful lot of criticism from journalists who say that we do not do our job properly, we are not mature, we cannot deal with hard issues and we are afraid and walk away from difficult things. We put this four-year Budget to the public before an election, and we are now rolling it out. We are coming into the third year of it now. This will probably not be the kind of thing that resonates too much with critics of this place, but other Administrations across the United Kingdom did not do what we have done. They dodged the issue of what lay beyond the election by giving one-year Budgets and then telling people what the consequences would be after the election. We set our stall out, which was the right thing to do. It gives certainty to Departments and enables them to plan for the longer term. Of course, the danger always was that, if the situation changed, some of the Budget data and decisions might be out of date. Again, we dealt with that through in-year monitoring and, of course, the review of the Budget for the past two years, where we looked at what had happened for the first two years, saw where there had been consistent pressures on some budgets, consistent underspends in others and made the necessary adjustments. I know that some people did not like that.

Mr Rogers is not here, but he referred to the Audit Office, which did not like the outcome of that process. However, if it consistently underspends — especially as it is the office that talks about good budgetary practice, always points the finger when there is not good budgetary practice and always tries to nit-pick where it perceives that mistakes have been made — it really cannot complain when we apply to its budget the very principles that it would want applied to Departments. It was not an attack, as I said. I just wanted to get that off my chest at the start before I ran out of steam. It is worth noting that nobody should be exempt from good budgetary practice, the review of budgets and ensuring that public resources are well spent, whether the amounts are small or large. Members who referred to good planning raised some important points.

Mr Weir raised the issue of capital spend and mentioned that, despite the recession, in 2012-13, we spent £1·3 billion. Again, it is worth noting that, as a result of some of the work done by the Budget review group and members of various Committees — I know that Mr McLaughlin was a big proponent of this — we found additional resources. Even with a 40% cut in our capital budget, we have been able to retain spending at that kind of level. It is down from the £1·6 billion spent in the previous year, but it is a high level of spend. Let us remember what it means to the Northern Ireland economy. Some 54% of work in the construction industry — that is up from 32% — is now a result of money spent by the Assembly and Departments in Northern Ireland. The construction industry faces difficult times, but it would have faced even more difficult times had it not been for the capital resources that we put into projects across Northern Ireland. It is worth remembering the impact of decisions that we make here on the general economy.

Of course, there has been some delay in spending on capital projects this year. Spending on the A5 has been delayed as a result of judicial reviews, and that probably accounts for a reduction of over £50 million. I do not want to get on my hobby horse — I have stacks of hobby horses to get through today anyhow —

Mr Hamilton: Do not talk about horses.

Mr Wilson: Talking about horses today may be a bit dangerous.

Judicial reviews and legal challenges by the very people who claim that they want the Executive to do something to stimulate the economy often lead to delays in expenditure when we need to get that expenditure into the economy. I raise this time and time again with many of the private sector bodies that come to see me. They talk about the impact that the Executive can have on stimulating the economy. Yet, very often, some of their members are the very people who, when unsuccessful in a tender, do their best to challenge that tender and delay the spend that we want to get out into the economy to ensure that more jobs are created and more people employed.

4.30 pm

Mr Weir also raised the issue of the dormant accounts scheme and asked for an update on it. I am disappointed that the scheme is not up and running. It would be an important addition to the money that is available for many organisations in the voluntary and social economy sectors.

We will expect to receive a 2·8% share of the money that is in the dormant accounts scheme. That will amount to £1·3 million currently and another £1·9 million this year. We have not been able to spend it, one of the reasons being that it still rests with the Executive. Sinn Féin may have some difficulties with the scheme, but I hope that

those can be cleared up so that the money can be made available to the organisations that would benefit from it.

Mr McLaughlin mentioned the devolution of additional fiscal powers and the way in which that could help future Budgets. He raised the issue yesterday as well, and I know that it is a theme to which he and his party will keep coming back.

There is a political element here on both sides. Of course Sinn Féin wants greater independence from the rest of the United Kingdom, even ignoring the economic impact that that would have. As a unionist, I do not want to see that economic independence. Therefore, we need to find some common ground, and we have done that in the Assembly.

The issues should be judged not on unionist or nationalist ideological grounds but on whether there is a clear case for the devolution of additional powers. That case would have to include the impact that those powers would have on the ability of the Assembly and the Executive to do things, the costs that would be involved and the benefits that would stem from it. Only on that basis should we then make the judgement as to whether we seek the devolution of those powers.

We did it in the case of air passenger duty. There were good reasons for that, and, as Minister of Finance and Personnel, I supported it. We are seeking it for corporation tax, which will be a challenge, but, on balance, it seems that the arguments are that it would be a good thing for the economy.

On other occasions we have sought exemptions from some of the tax regimes that apply in the rest of the United Kingdom. I know that this will not please the Green Party too much, but the fact that we are now exempt from the carbon tax, provided that it is not seen to go against state rules, will please electricity consumers all over Northern Ireland. That was a good call by the Executive. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I lobbied hard for that, and it was accepted by Westminster. There are other green taxes, such as the aggregates levy, that are damaging to our economy. Unfortunately, because of an EU ruling, we have to fight for that exemption to be maintained in Northern Ireland.

Therefore, there are occasions when it is the right thing to do, but the idea that we should break free of the existing fiscal restraints for ideological reasons is not the right way forward.

Mr McLaughlin also said that we need to look at strategies to grow the private sector. There is ongoing work to be done over the next number of months and years, and I hope that the Committee for Finance and Personnel will play a role, along with other Committees that need to do so as well.

As the situation changes and as the economic circumstances change, of course we have to look at our strategies. We have to ask whether they are working as well as they should and could be, and whether there are different things that we can do. First, no one has a monopoly on knowledge on this. Secondly, just because you have done something in the past does not mean that you should keep on doing it into the future. Thirdly, we have to look at the changing contexts and decide what can be done. I look forward to the work that can be done in the future on those cross-cutting strategies.

Mr Cree raised the issue of the Audit Office. I think that I have dealt with part of that.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes; I will.

Mr D Bradley: The Audit Office produced a report entitled 'Department of Finance and Personnel — Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand' in which it stated that a potential £100 million saving for the Northern Ireland taxpayer is not being realised because government agencies are not collaborating in procurement and that, in fact, only around 4% of the potential is being realised. That is a reference to the way that things were done. The Minister has just said that the way that things were done in the past is not necessarily the way that they should be done in the future. Does he agree that, given that report and its proposals, we should change the way that things were done in the past and realise that potential £100 million of savings, which we could badly do with?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member raised that point. It illustrates one of the cautions that we should have about auditors, accountants and the Audit Office, who sometimes sit behind the desk with the blinds drawn, ignoring the reality of the outside world.

The Member should think about what he has just said and some of the things that he has identified himself with in the past as a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee. I have a report from the Finance and Personnel Committee — and I am very sympathetic to many of the recommendations in it — that stated that we should be tailoring our purchasing to try to help Northern Ireland firms and ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland get the biggest possible share of public expenditure in Northern Ireland because that helps the local economy.

Collaborative tendering brings advantages in money saved. However, do not forget who will be the first to complain once we get into collaborative tendering, making tenders larger and putting out more complicated tenders. Representatives of industry in Northern Ireland sometimes come to me and say, "Why do you not break tenders up so that small firms can benefit from them? More small firms, which may not have the financial wherewithal to go for a large tender, could then bid for smaller tenders." I hope that the Member sees the tension there. In fact, as far as I can remember, he was actually a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee when the report on procurement came to the Assembly and was debated. He cannot ask, on one hand, whether I will abide by what the Audit Office states in its report on collaborative tendering — yes, there will be savings, although I do not know whether those will amount to £100 million — and, on the other hand, say, "By the way, we want procurement within the EU rules to be designed in such a way that benefits small firms in Northern Ireland."

I am glad that he raised that point, because I think that it shows the tension that there sometimes is between one section of government and this Assembly, and even the tension in what Assembly Members often ask for.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes; I am quite happy to give way.

Mr D Bradley: I have listened to what the Minister said. However, according to that report, the total potential savings were somewhere in the region of £140 million. I think that around £38 million of savings are now being realised. The extent of the total potential savings allows for the type of compromise that can be found between having larger contracts and ensuring that smaller firms in Northern Ireland benefit from procurement.

Mr Wilson: I do not know how you will get those savings. What the Audit Office is thinking about there is, for example, when we order desks to order them in one job lot. If a Department or part of a Department decides to order desks, you will maybe find that only three or four local suppliers will apply for it because it is a small order. If we put out an order for all of the desks required across the public service in Northern Ireland, you could be absolutely sure that, first of all, some of the small suppliers could not actually handle such a tender, but secondly that tenderers from right across Europe would be in on it. That is where the difficulty lies. If we want to make savings on procurement, that is dead on. However, on the other hand, do not then be coming to this Assembly and complaining that there is a small supplier in your constituency who used to be able to get into government as a big customer but is now locked out. I get that all the time. That is the tension that there is there. We have probably strayed a little, but I was misled — sorry, waylaid — by the Member. *[Laughter.]* The Member misled himself, but he waylaid me and I moved away from the central purpose of the debate.

Mr Cree also raised the issue of the Titanic project and the £18 million, as did a number of people. There is no danger, if we do as the ETI Minister has asked us, of losing the £18 million of European money that was going to be used as part of the payment for the Titanic signature project. We do not know, and we will only find out by testing it in court, but if the Titanic signature project was no longer eligible for the £18 million and we ran out of time in finding some other use for that £18 million, then, and only then, would we lose the money.

That is why I support the ETI Minister, who spotted the problem. She is convinced — and look at all of the advice that was given to DETI: it looks convincing — that the way in which the procurement was done falls within EU rules. However, why would we risk losing the £18 million by simply waiting until we have explored all of the investigations on that particular issue when the easy way out is to simply say, "That £18 million is available. It can be used by other Government Departments"? We simply take money from the Budget which would have been used by other Departments, use it for the Titanic signature project and let other Departments bid for the £18 million. All you have done there is move the money about, and you have not lost it. That will not cost us any more. The only time it will cost us money is if we run out of time to spend the money. Then that £18 million would go back to Europe.

Mr Cree: That money can be used for existing approved contracts in the Budget. That is why I wondered whether you could identify the projects. So, obviously, if the money is switched to those particular headings, it means that the £18 million would be used up and the £18 million that those projects were looking for would be free for other purposes. Is that right? Is there a time frame on that?

Mr Wilson: The Member has got it exactly right. The only time frame is that Europe requires that the money be spent within the next two years. So, the time frame is about finding the projects that are available that can spend the £18 million before 2015, and there are plenty of such projects, as the Member said. What we simply do is use European money to fund those projects and take £18 million from them and make it available to DETI.

He also asked about headroom. The total headroom that we have looked for is £36·6 million. We have to specify to Treasury where, if we underspent that money, it would go to. We have specified that £21·6 million would go to the Department of Justice (DOJ) and £15 million would go to Health. That assumes that there is going to be underspend identified between now and the end of the financial year. If no underspend is identified, the headroom will not be used. The budget will be closely monitored in the final stages of the financial year to ensure that, if that money is available, it is used for that purpose.

4.45 pm

Mr Dickson raised two basic issues: how we spend our money in DRD on roads versus public transport; and Northern Ireland Water. I was not quite sure whether he wants more money to be spent on public transport — of course, the result would be less money spent on roads — because he also acknowledged that we are a car-owning society and are very reliant on cars. Indeed, like me, he campaigned very hard for significant expenditure on roads in his constituency. I would love to be able to claim sole responsibility for the fact that nearly £300 million will be spent on roads in east Antrim. Unfortunately, I cannot claim that, even though some other Members have claimed that they had a big responsibility for it. He is not here at the moment. I was not quite clear whether he wants less money spent on roads.

There is still a roads infrastructure problem, and we have spent significant amounts of money on public transport, such as the allocation of £12·5 million for bus replacement. Indeed, there will be some benefit to our constituency in so far as some of the work on those vehicles will be carried out there. There is £1·9 million for improvements on the railway line, and, in east Antrim, we not only have new rolling stock, which has improved the service greatly, but significant investment in railway stations and in encouraging people to use the railways. He and I recently attended the St Brides Street car park in Carrickfergus, where the park-and-ride scheme has been extended to try to get people, even if they want to use their car to get from home to the town centre, to at least get onto the train to get into Belfast after that. We have also committed £4 million to concessionary fares to encourage elderly people. So, we have sought to get that balance, and I hope that he recognises that.

Mr Dickson also raised the issue of Northern Ireland Water, and I thought that he was very clever in doing that. I know what he is getting at, and I suspect that all Members in this Assembly know what he is getting at, but he never made any commitment to it. I will give some examples of the language that was used. He said that we have just had the Minister in with a Bill about Northern Ireland Water. The Member is, of course, very unhappy about that and would like it to be changed. However, the Minister was only in here for about two minutes because, as he made clear, there were no amendments to the Bill. I would have thought that, if the Member and his party were keen to see

changes, they would table some amendments. He said that we have to approach the issue with maturity and that there are difficult decisions on governance and finance. It is all very good, but is the bottom line that the Alliance Party is saying, "The decision not to charge people for water is wrong, and we want to introduce water charges"? It is not about simply governance or maturity but about whether or not we get money, if not from government sources then from the public.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way because the Member will maybe tell me what he wants.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister. You are absolutely right: there was no amendment to the water Bill because it was unamendable. That was checked out, and you will read my comments on the Bill in the Committee report, where I laid down my views very clearly.

We are missing an opportunity, and if I did not say that the Assembly has to face up to the reality of charging for water for domestic customers in a fair, open and transparent way, I am quite happy to say so now.

Mr Wilson: I appreciate the Member's candour. It is a brave thing to say. He is right that we need to debate the issue. I suspect that not too many Members would have taken the stance that he has taken, which I know will not be popular with some people. Nevertheless, there are big issues coming down the road with infrastructure, including EU directives on how we deal with flooding and the fact that the Treasury is now saying that we have to make up our minds about whether NI Water will be a government body or an arm's-length body.

Mr Buchanan raised issues about the Department for Employment and Learning. He is quite right about the importance of money being made available for training. In selling Northern Ireland abroad, one of our main selling points is our people. We have to sell the skills and work ethic of our people and their ability to help employers who come here to operate a profitable business.

It is for that reason that, on top of the money that Department for Employment and Learning received in the Budget at the start of the period, two significant allocations were made to tackle unemployment during the period that we are discussing today. Those were given early in the year so that schemes could be put in place during 2012-13. There was £8 million for the Steps to Work programme and £5·8 million for the youth unemployment scheme, which again shows commitment. In addition, there was money for people who want to do PhDs, so it was also directed at the top end of the market.

Mr Buchanan also spoke about funding for various projects, including the Omagh hospital and the Lisanelly education campus. The Education Minister and the Health Minister will have to decide on those issues in future budget allocations.

The Member mentioned the gas infrastructure and welcomed the additional money that will now be made available to take the gas pipeline to the west. If we are going to deal with energy costs and fuel poverty, there has to be an expansion of the gas pipeline across Northern Ireland.

Public utilities and such single producers have to be regulated, and that topic might be worthy of a debate in the Assembly at some time. The role of the regulator has not been helpful in decisions about rolling out and getting investment in the infrastructure that is required across Northern Ireland. No matter whether we are talking about gas, electricity or water, I find it difficult to understand how the regulator can be so out of touch on some issues. The very fact that he referred Phoenix Natural Gas to the Competition Commission and got knocked back on so many things tells me that serious issues about the role of the regulator need to be discussed. I make that point because it does and will have a significant impact on our ability to attract investment.

Many Members talked about private investment, and if decisions are sometimes incomprehensible and certainly not explained by the regulator, which then impact on the ability of private utilities, albeit monopolies, to raise money and increase the infrastructure in Northern Ireland, we will all be the poorer for it. Some Members may want to take up the issue and debate it in the Assembly. I will give way to the Member. I thought that he was pointing at someone behind me.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for giving way. I was not going to start a panto show there, by calling out, "He's behind you."

I presume that the Minister refers to the recent dispute between the Utility Regulator and Phoenix Gas over its price determination. The Minister questions the decision that the regulator took, which was that it will negatively impact on future investment into the gas industry. However, the truth is that the gas industry here is very well, and very heavily, regulated. It is run so well that there is a guaranteed return for investors who want to come into the gas market. The gas market is not new here any more; it has been here since 1996, so it is fairly well established. If someone wants to come in and invest in it, they will get a substantial return.

On that one issue of the price determination between the Utility Regulator and Phoenix Gas, the decision by the Competition Commission is completely independent of any arm of government here. We have no authority over it at all. That decision actually returned a net saving of £19 million for consumers, compared with the proposal put forward by Phoenix Gas. So I think that we are very —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Flanagan: I am just finishing —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am very mindful that the Minister told us yesterday to stick to the subject under discussion. I remind all Members to return to the subject of the Bill.

Mr Wilson: I was only responding to the points that were raised by some of the Members. All I can say in response to the Member is that the Competition Commission certainly found that the decision by the Utility Regulator was wrong on many counts and, indeed, that it was not in the public interest. The Member may talk about the returns on gas and the savings to consumers, but there are no savings to consumers who do not have access to gas. Many people in the west of the Province — people in his own constituency — will be very surprised to hear him say that he would prefer that they do not have access

to gas and will have to rely on oil and other expensive forms of heating. The Member may want to reflect on the intervention that he has made, or maybe the case is that he does not really care whether his constituents have a choice of fuel in the west of the Province.

That really brings me on to some of the other stuff that Mr Flanagan talked about. If he has got it wrong on gas, I can tell you that he has got even more wrong when it comes to the fiscal position of Northern Ireland. I really do wonder who writes the kind of stuff that he came out with in the Assembly today. He referred to this "overestimated" deficit that we live with. Having said that it was overestimated, and even after he was challenged by the Member for South Down, he still could not tell us what the overestimation was, how it occurred or the extent of the problem that he had identified.

However, I have to say that he should perhaps talk to some of the Members of his own party. They have asked 60 questions about this issue in the Assembly. Mr Flanagan has asked one Assembly question on it. Despite all the answers that have been given, no one in Sinn Féin, as far as I am aware, has yet challenged the methodology as to how the fiscal deficit has been estimated. And it is an estimate. In all the answers that I have given on this issue, I have made it clear that it is an estimate. By very necessity, it has to be an estimate. However, the methodology which is used is accepted by the Office of National Statistics. You would imagine that if anyone wanted to challenge it, it would be the Scottish Executive, but they accept it. If they thought they were having the wool pulled over their eyes, they would not accept it. Do not forget that they are going to have a real referendum on independence, not the kind of pseudo-referendum that Sinn Féin is talking about. Sinn Féin crosses its fingers behind its back and hopes that the Secretary of State never agrees to it, because the 65% of the people in Northern Ireland who have declared themselves in favour of the Union would give Sinn Féin its answer.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Minister has just exhausted my patience. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wilson: I am actually dealing with the fiscal deficit, which was raised. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: You could have fooled me, Minister.

5.00 pm

Mr Wilson: It is related. The Scottish Executive have not questioned the methodology of how the fiscal deficit has been worked out. If it is overestimated and if it is overestimated by a certain amount, let us know and let us hear what is wrong with the methodology. As a result of using wrong methodology, by how much is the estimate out? Is the deficit much smaller than has been shown? There will have to be an awful lot of mistakes made to eliminate a deficit of £10·5 billion, which was identified in 2010-11, the year for which it was finalised.

Of course, Mr Flanagan has a political point to make here. It is an inconvenient truth that we are dependent on the rest of the United Kingdom. He says that we have to break away from these decisions that are made at Westminster. Well, the decisions that are made at Westminster actually ensure that we are £10·5 billion better off than we would be if decisions were not made at Westminster. Maybe he should remember that. It has an impact. It has an impact on the amount of money that we have for health. Of course, Sinn Féin does not worry about whether we have a health service any longer. They are all rich enough now to pay for it. They go to private clinics, and not just clinics in the United Kingdom; they head off to private clinics in America.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, I insist that you stick to the Bill, and you are not to go back to Cuba again.

Mr Wilson: I point out, Mr Deputy Speaker, that it is all related to the fact that we get a subvention from Westminster, and that subvention helps to pay for services that, fortunately, some of the richer Members of Sinn Féin do not have to pay for any longer. Therefore, they do not give a stuff about the fiscal deficit because they can afford to pay it out of their own pocket.

Mr McCallister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Certainly, yes. I hope that it is a helpful intervention.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister. Does he agree that, even if we all went private and did not need to spend anything on health, we would still have a huge subvention from Westminster?

Mr Wilson: The Member is absolutely right. We spend over £4 billion on health. Even if we could pay for that out of our own pocket, we would still have a fiscal deficit, as the Member has pointed out — his maths are very good — of nearly £6 billion. That is the point.

The other thing that Mr Flanagan raised — again, it was related tangentially to the Budget — was that we needed to look at how we did our trade. I wrote it down:

"The border is a barrier to trade."

I do not know; he is certainly up the left on the fiscal deficit, but the border being a barrier to trade? Has he never heard of our membership of the EU, the single European market or the fact that we can trade all across Europe without barriers? There may be a geographical or a political barrier, but the single European market means that there can be trade between countries. We cannot put barriers up because of a border. If we are going to have a rational debate about the Budget, the way forward and the improvements in our economy, at least we should try to stick to the facts, for goodness' sake, before we go down the route that he has gone down.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: He wants to try to redeem himself on this. Mr Deputy Speaker, if I give way for an intervention here and he leads me down another path, I hope that you will give me an opportunity to answer. You will not? Then I will not let him in on an intervention.

I come to the points that Mrs Overend made about the performance of Invest Northern Ireland. She said that we needed more clarity on Invest Northern Ireland, asked why it had reduced requirements and said that it needed greater budget flexibility. Let us have some clarity on Invest Northern Ireland. In 2011-12, the money in the Invest Northern Ireland budget supported investment commitments of £450 million by local and foreign-owned businesses. Over 6,500 new jobs were promoted: 1,700 in locally owned companies, 1,100 in externally owned companies and a further 1,300 through locally focused

new business starts. Over 2,000 local companies were supported in one way or another to expand, secure investments etc. Overall, those figures translated into real benefits for a large number of Invest NI clients and widened our business base.

Members want clarity about what was done with the money. Of course, some of it was returned. I am just a bit disturbed about the call that Mrs Overend and other Members made for DETI to have greater flexibility to use such underspends. There is an agreed procedure in the Assembly when a Department cannot spend money on the purpose for which the Assembly voted it. This is the important point: we as Assembly Members listen to what Ministers say, the Executive present their priorities and budgets are voted on that basis. Members ought to think more when they talk about budget flexibility. Do they really want a situation in which a Minister bids for money, does not spend it and then decides, without any reference to the Assembly, to spend it on something different? That is what budget flexibility of that nature means. There is a proper way of dealing with an underspend. If a Minister cannot spend money on the purpose for which it was voted, it comes back here as a reduced requirement. The reduced requirements are presented to the Assembly, and it is decided how the money will be spent. It may even go back to the same Department for a different purpose, but at least the Assembly is informed, which is important given the calls for transparency.

There is a worrying trend among Ministers — I have mentioned some of them in the Assembly in the past — who want to have autonomy over their budget. That really means that, once they have the money in their hand, they can thumb their nose at Members of the Assembly. That, to me, is not a way of ensuring budgetary transparency and accountability. I was glad that the Member raised the issue because it gave me an opportunity to make the point, which I believe is very important. It has implications for Members who are not Ministers but who want and should have a say in how budgets are used.

Mrs McKevitt raised issues about money that was sent back to the centre. She gave the impression that it was wasted, squandered or not used in a way that was effective. I remind her that there will be occasions when Ministers have to return money. That is the purpose of monitoring rounds. My gripe is when they leave it deliberately to the last minute. Sometimes, Ministers cannot afford to do otherwise because they do not know until the last minute that the money will not be used. If money is returned early, it can be put into schemes. If you look at what happened with the returned money this year, you will see that it was not squandered in any way. Some of it went into helping co-ownership, which aided the construction industry and allowed first-time buyers to get into the market. A lot of it went into health, which enabled waiting lists to be tackled and new drugs to be financed. I do not think that anyone would suggest that that was squandering the money in any way. Some of it went into road maintenance, and, since we all drive along roads and get complaints from constituents about potholes and so on, road maintenance is important. Some of it went into schools maintenance so that schools can have defects dealt with. This might be partly my responsibility because I talked about Ministers returning money and the difficulties that that causes. It causes difficulty only if it is unanticipated and left to the last minute. That is why we have to keep a number of projects on hold where money can go into them quickly. It is the kind of issue that the media sometimes love to pick up on: when money comes back, it is sometimes squandered just to get rid of it. It was not squandered. It was spent on good projects that we can all stand over.

Mr Gardiner raised a large number of questions about the health service and whether we were as generous to the health budget as we claimed. We protected the health budget at the start of this four-year period more than it was protected in any other part of the United Kingdom and more than any other budget in Northern Ireland was protected. It was one of the few budgets to have a real terms increase. Even in England, on top of the protection that the Government said that they were giving the health budget, they then had to find £20 billion worth of efficiency savings, which is causing the problems that we see in the headlines all the time.

We not only protected the health budget but gave the Minister flexibility to move money within it — the sort of flexibility that I said I would prefer Ministers not to have. The Health Minister had that flexibility because we realised that, given the pressures, he should have the ability to move any savings around during the four-year period. Last year, of course, we made additional in-year allocations to the health budget. This year alone, £33 million was given in resource DEL and £15 million in capital DEL. Over the four years, the resource DEL for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will increase by 8·3%, which is well above the rate of inflation and a real increase.

Mr Gardiner raised issues concerning the capital spend. I cannot give him a comparison, but he spoke about a number of projects. If I give him the figures, perhaps he can do the comparisons himself; I do not have all the figures to hand. He asked how the capital spend for the Department of Health compared with, for example, the capital spend proposed for stadia. The capital spend last year was £321·7 million. This year, it will be £223·5 million, and, in the final year, it will be £200·3 million. If the Member takes some of the projects that he listed, he can compare capital spend in health with some of the capital spend for other Departments.

The Member also asked what additional money was given for capital spend. In-year capital bids that were met this year include £4 million for the Belfast Trust site, which was on top of the available capital; £8 million for service infrastructure; and £4 million for other smaller capital projects, such as the car park extension at the Ulster Hospital. I hope that that answers some of the Member's questions.

Mr Rogers asked whether we had our priorities right, but I had some difficulty with the rest of his speech. Asking whether we have our priorities right was a legitimate question to ask, but getting your priorities right means that maybe you are not spending as much on one thing but too much on something else. That is what priorities are all about. After asking the question, we then got a catalogue about the money spent on the ESA, classrooms, the number of schools, school builds, the size of classes and the fact that we needed to ensure that all newly qualified teachers got at least a year's experience. Those might be the priorities of Mr Rogers — as a former teacher, I can understand why he would have them — but, if those are the priorities, what are the lesser priorities? I did not hear anything about that. If Members are going to raise those kinds of issues, that needs to be addressed.

5.15 pm

The Member also queried the scheme announced by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which is to be delivered by the Department of Education. Under that scheme, 200 newly qualified teachers would be employed to help youngsters who are struggling; for example, when a teacher makes an assessment that a pupil due to get D in their GCSEs could, with a wee bit of additional help, be pushed up to a C. That is a good scheme to address educational underachievement. It ticks one of the boxes that Mr Rogers raised, namely whether we can find jobs for newly qualified teachers and give them the opportunity to get a bit of experience. I do not think that he should write that scheme off. My one regret is that, having announced the scheme in October or November, the Department of Education still has not even advertised for those teachers. It is one thing for us to have great policies and schemes, but, if we are slow to introduce them, maybe we have to ask questions. Maybe that is an issue that people will raise with the Education Minister.

I have dealt with the issue of the Northern Ireland Office.

Mrs Dobson raised the issue of the DARD headquarters relocation. An announcement has, of course, been made about that. It is my view that the matter is cross-cutting and, therefore, requires Executive approval. For clarification, all we have at the minute is a specific site that has been referred to the Executive. To date, the only decision we have to make is to consider whether Ballykelly is a suitable site. A lot of work is still required on the relocation and the costs that would be incurred. That includes asset transfer, office estate impacts and potential staffing consequences. Those need to be fully identified for the Executive to make a final decision and consider funding, because considerable funding will be required. I understand that a business case is being worked on at the moment.

The Member raised other issues about the performance of the Agriculture Minister. I really do not want to get into a spat between two female Members of the Assembly, because I do not think I would win. I will stay out of the differences that she has with the Agriculture Minister. I am not usually circumspect, but I will be on this occasion. That is the wisest choice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be pleased to hear that I will conclude the debate on the Budget Bill. We are now at the close of the Second Reading, including Budget provisions for the early months of 2013-14. I commend the work of the Assembly and the formation of the Bill. I ask the Assembly to support it.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Second Stage of the Budget Bill [NIA 18/11-15] be agreed.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Care Homes: South Antrim

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to be able to put forward this topic. I will certainly not take 15 minutes, probably more like 10. I thank the Minister and colleagues from South Antrim for being here.

I am pleased to raise the matter, as I am sure that it is not just pertinent to South Antrim. The issue in South Antrim has been raised with me three times in the past six months. I will not name the areas today, nor will I name the companies involved, as I do not think that that is necessary to make the points that I need to make. If necessary, I will speak to the Department or the Minister afterwards, if he wishes to know more pertinent information.

In South Antrim, as I said, there are three cases of long-established housing developments where typical families of all ages and in all forms and guises have thrived together and where one of the houses has now been bought or sold or is in the process of being bought or sold to become a care home. You might ask, “What is wrong with that?”. Initially, nothing.

The Bamford proposals recommended that we should not keep people in institutions other than when we really have to. In South Antrim, we have a hospital that was, until recently, home to some 200 people with severe learning disabilities or similar conditions, and, in order to follow Bamford, we have seen nearly all being moved into new institutional homes. I congratulate all those involved in pursuing what has to be the right thing to do.

Many of us listened to much opposition from families who saw their loved ones being split up from their colleagues of many, many years and from the routines and habitual comforts of their institutionalised home. Moving them to new homes, to supported living in everyday residential areas where they can be part of everyday society and, where possible, go for walks in the park, go shopping, go to the cinema or go to church — doing what any of us can do — is the Bamford way forward. Time will tell if that is right, but it has to be worth trying.

When those ideas were put forward in the Chamber on previous occasions, I asked whether we had really thought them through. Our excellent health service and all those involved in looking after those with severe learning disabilities have certainly thought through how they look after their family. I think that it is nicer to call them “family”. What we have not thought through is how this rehoming will work on the ground with everyone else. That is how it should fit. That is why I brought forward this debate today.

Before we reach the crux of the debate, I just want to remind you that each member of that family being rehomed is someone’s brother, sister, mother or father. Each is a loving person who has dignity and the right to as comfortable a life as we can give them. Each has feelings

and emotions and the right to joy and fun and to live their life to the full, as much as any of the rest of us. So, I ask everyone to keep that in mind as the debate goes on.

I have set the scene; now I want to move into two scenarios. First, we have a residential area, as I have said, of families — all with their own lives, problems and enjoyments. The partnership from the health service, working with the housing association, decides that that housing development is ideal. It is a good quality housing development. It is in a large cul-de-sac; it is where quiet family life exists; and there is no through traffic. Each house has a garden, front and back, a pavement, and probably fulfils most families' idyll.

The housing association wants to find exactly that. It wants to find a suitable house for sale of that idyllic type, preferably in an area where its family has close ties, close links to the community and a chance of building on that idyll with the community, which also looks at the same ideal, and which, in time, we might think and hope, will adopt that new family.

However, at the moment, consultation is not compulsory, and guidelines on how to communicate with the residents have not been perfected. In this scenario, a short, reasonably blunt letter is sent to some of the houses near to where the house chosen for purchase is — where they are planning to buy and to put the new family in place. In that letter, they state that they wish to purchase the house and to place in it two people with learning disabilities in supported living.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Clarke: Does the Member accept that the biggest problem is not necessarily the consultation and making people aware of the idea of supported living, but the fears, some unfounded, about that, which others raise? We have read that people believe that the individuals could be sex offenders. There are different suggestions. I think that that has caused more fear than the consultation process. In support of what the trust has done, it has made people aware and consulted them beforehand, but others are indicating what types of people could possibly live in these areas, and that causes more fear than the consultation process.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Member for his comments. I partially agree with them, but, if he lets me finish the speech, he will hear that I am moving into those sorts of points.

The consultation was the right way to proceed, and I congratulate them for doing it, but much more was needed to be said. Sadly, all the letters did was raise concerns, and we have just heard some typical concerns. Not everyone understands what learning disabilities are nor what supported housing means. When only a very few were notified, it meant that for some, not all, the rumour mill ran wild, and, of course, it became most active.

If you then looked at the housing association's website, you would see that it provides accommodation to support people with complex needs, which, of course, opens it up even more. If you carried on looking at the website, you would see that it talks about individual houses, bungalows and group settings. What does it mean by a group setting? Does that mean that many more are going to be moved in? If you read on, you will see that it states that it requires accommodation that can be specifically adapted. What sort of adaptations are we talking about? Is that going to change the whole house? Further on, the website states that it is possible that there will be a site office. Before we have really thought about it, a lot of things start happening, and people get more and more concerned.

It takes time to arrange these meetings. At the first meeting, we discovered that it was for people with severe learning disabilities and that there was going to be 24-hour care. Rather than placating the fears, it did the opposite. At that meeting, we also discovered that it was a 10-week consultation and that there were only six weeks left. Sadly, that meeting caused more concerns to be raised. At the second meeting, with further residents, we had an excellent and thorough briefing from the health trust and the association. It allowed many matters to be clarified, but, at the same time, the rumour mill kept going and more and more concerns came out and one fed off the other.

The question I am asking the Minister today is this: could we look at a proper PR campaign, local or national, that shows the benefits of Bamford, the excellence of the housing associations and their staff, and the need to give these families a chance of a family life, as far as is possible, with their new neighbours?

5.30 pm

I also ask the Minister to set up guidelines using known expertise on how to consult so that everyone in the area is involved over a much longer time before decisions are made. That will mean that residents do not feel that it is a done deal and that everyone understands the intentions and reasons for such a purchase. I ask for a longer and more careful consultation period and a good PR exercise.

In the second scenario, a house is bought or privately rented in a similar residential area to the first scenario, but there is no consultation. High green wire fences are put up at the front and back, secure, ugly doors and access facilities are installed, and two severely autistic people are moved in to be cared for and to become part of the family.

The neighbours, however, knew nothing until it had all happened. Cars were parked all over the place causing congestion, and bin lorries could not get in. The same sort of issues arose, and everyone in the area became concerned. Most MLAs in the constituency and the local MP became involved.

Again, I ask for proper PR. I also ask for more consultation, because in that case there were no guidelines to state that there should be consultation. I hesitate to ask for more guidelines and rules because in many cases we have too many, but now that this has started to happen everywhere, we must think about putting guidelines in place. It is good to know that, apparently, only 31 of those 200 people need to be found homes and families. Not all those cases have resulted in problems similar to the ones that I am talking about today.

Purchasing a home is one of the most important investments in family life, and the sense of security that that brings should be sacrosanct. At one meeting, an estate agent said that he would definitely mark a house down in value if it were situated beside a care home. How sad it is that such a generalisation can be made. That makes my call for a PR campaign all the more important.

If there is consultation on guidelines, the Minister needs to have discussions with the Environment Minister and the Social Development Minister to link to planning guidelines

and DSD funding. If this Adjournment debate is to achieve anything, it is that those two things happen, we have proper guidelines, and everyone can learn to live together properly.

Mr Girvan: I thank my colleague for securing the debate this evening. I want to explore why we have adopted the care in the community approach.

As the Bamford report states, this is the proper way in which to deal with people. They should not be kept in hospitals or institutions but should be integrated into a community, sometimes into the community that they came from. They are the vulnerable people, not the communities into which they are moving.

I attended one meeting. I think that people should be proud that their area was chosen as a safe environment for vulnerable people who feel that the community will be there to protect them. I understand that consultation takes place only when a housing association is involved in the purchase of a property. Housing associations get public money to purchase a property, so they must consult. Private landlords in other areas have offered their properties to a health trust, and it has located people in those properties without using the consultation process. Residents find out only after the event.

I appreciate that my colleague Mr Kinahan mentioned another facility and that fences were put up round it. I feel that this is the wrong approach. I believe that it does not allow independent living. This is not a residential home; it is their home, and it is going to be their home in the community, and I think that we need to focus on that. They will be part of the community, and they will play an active role in the community, visiting the shops, leisure centres and facilities. We need to say that that is part of it.

Unfortunately, when fences start to go up, the house ceases to be an ordinary residence in a development; it starts taking on a different stance from neighbouring houses. I appreciate that we have lived through a history in which some properties had large fences round them for security reasons. We happen to have one in Carnmoney in which an MP lived. He ended up with large fences round his house, and there were cameras. You would have thought that he lived in a barracks. I hope that those days are gone

From a security and health point of view, we have to realise that Muckamore Abbey — and I am happy to mention it — is being wound down and that only those for whom it is safe to go back into the community will be put into the community; others for whom it is not safe, will not. In light of that, this has taken a long time. It has been a desire for 20 years to bring people back to living in communities, and it is only in recent times that we have started to make inroads in that direction. A number of people in the abbey should not be there. They have the right to live in a community and be supported.

I appreciate that there is fear in communities about what is happening. A certain message went out in Ballyclare, and, unfortunately, it created a problem. Those who fuelled it did not do anything to make it any easier for us to progress the matter. There are areas in which I have heard people say that it is fantastic; they know that the property is well maintained, that the garden is probably in better order than their own — and they are living next door — and that they are good neighbours. If there were problems, those would be dealt with.

I really feel that this is something that we need to consider. It is about social inclusion, and the issue is about how the consultation is carried out. I believe, from the DSD's perspective and having to engage in that process, that sending out a general letter is not the way to do it. We knew that people with learning difficulties would be housed there, and that it was going to be their home. They would be tenants, just like anybody else who rents a property. The issue has to be dealt with properly, and the consultation needs to say exactly what this is: it is a home for those with learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties. That is the sector that we are dealing with.

Assurances were given to people that this is the only type of person who would be in that home. It would not be a case of rotation; it would be a steady group of people who would have the house as their home for the long term. People would not be moving in and out. I think that there was a fear in the community that there would be one group one week and another group the next. These people need to be supported in the community.

I appreciate that the Northern Trust is involved, which is key in this matter. It is vital that we bring it to these sorts of engagements. We need to ensure that the consultation says exactly what this is, so that there will not be any ambiguity or opportunity for the rumour mill to start and for the rumour to go out into the community about what this might be and cause fear.

I cannot say whether these facilities will or will not be detrimental to the value of adjacent properties, but my impression is that they should not, if they are managed correctly. It is all down to ensuring that the management of these facilities is correct.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker.

I have to say that I had some concerns about this being the subject of an Adjournment debate, because I do not suppose that we are going to be in the situation of discussing the wider policy issues on a constituency-by-constituency basis. I also have some concerns that there was certain heavy-handedness, even by some of the elected representatives, in dealing with the concerns. These are very sensitive matters.

I am a staunch supporter of the care in the community process, and I want to say that to the Minister. It is progressive, it is clinically sound and it has been proven to be so. I visited Muckamore Abbey within days of being elected to represent South Antrim, and I commend the progress that has been made. Mistakes were made, and I am conscious that they were perhaps made in an anxiety to respond to the pressure to get care in the community outcomes for some of the long-stay patients, who, quite clearly and with the necessary support and opportunities to be skilled, would get to the point where they could be full members of our community. They always had that potential, but that was not always encouraged or recognised.

My sense of it is that, at times, elected representatives have to hold their nerve. In any set of circumstances, there is always the potential for a rumour mill. It might

be a careless remark or people who set out for entirely selfish not-in-my-back-yard motivations. There are all of those opinions, and I think that we have to take them into account. We cannot legislate those emotions at a local level out of existence. The housing authority and the trust should engage with the local community in an open fashion and give commitments that are seen to be delivered.

An example was cited about putting up fences. I think that a founding principle should be that whatever accommodation and location is chosen should look absolutely the same as any of the properties in the vicinity. There should be nothing whatsoever to mark it out as distinct or separate, because any differences will invite more negative or reactionary responses.

There is a facility for elected representatives. South Antrim leads the way in this, and at a cross-community, cross-party level, people are prepared to come together privately to deal with issues and try to identify solutions away from the headlines. We should continue that practice and commend it to other constituents. Rather than running to newspapers or holding public meetings, unless you are quite certain that people have all the information and that no more strident voices are going to run away with the issue, we will do justice to the individuals who need to be supported by us on this journey.

I strongly commend the Minister for the work and the progress that has been made in the delivery of commitments that were given several mandates ago. I urge him to keep up that good work, especially with the support of the MLAs in this constituency. It has been used as a pathfinder. Likewise, let us hope that the housing association involved and the trust meet their responsibilities. Let us attempt to ensure that we do not pander to the lowest common denominator on this issue, otherwise we will never solve this problem or do justice to long-stay patients.

Mr Ford: Although I want to speak as Mitchel McLaughlin just has about justice for a number of individuals in our community, I should emphasise that I am not speaking as the Minister of Justice, but as a constituency MLA. I should also probably declare an interest, although it is a bit out of date, as a former social worker. Indeed, at one stage, I failed to get a job with what was then the Northern Board doing rehabilitation work in Muckamore Abbey Hospital.

5.45 pm

There is a fundamental issue here. I regret missing the first few minutes of Mr Kinahan's speech, but I heard him speak about the rights of individuals, which is fundamentally what this issue is about. Antrim has been host for many years to a significant number of people who have moved out of long-stay hospital accommodation, whether that was in Holywell Hospital or Muckamore Abbey Hospital. That process has happened across the town, mostly in Housing Executive estates. We have now reached the position where, for a number of reasons, housing associations and the trust have looked into some private housing, particularly the benefits of a large bungalow, perhaps for people who are less mobile than would have to be the case for them to live in a three-bedroom Housing Executive semi with a staircase. The real question that arises is this: what are the rights of individuals to a normal family life in those circumstances?

I have had contact with immediate neighbours of people who were, I think, quoted in the first example. There is strong acceptance that Antrim has provided a hospitable home for many people moving out of long-stay care, and those neighbours wish to continue to provide that hospitable care and a good neighbourly atmosphere. We need to look at how these issues are handled to ensure that we do not hype up concerns and fears that do not exist. Sadly, in my time as an MLA, I have also assisted some of my former colleagues in looking at the issue of the location of a children's home, where certain people did not want such a home in their area. In my other capacity as Minister of Justice, I know the difficulty finding somewhere to serve as a hostel in which sex offenders and other offenders can be managed successfully in making the transition to the community. However, it is surely incumbent on all of us, as public representatives, to ensure that we do not add to fears. We must recognise, as Mr Kinahan highlighted, the rights of individuals, which means that people do not necessarily have a veto over what happens in their area. The notion that we somehow have to take a different attitude to private housing estates, rather than Housing Executive estates, seems contrary to saying that we provide the best and most appropriate facilities for those with particular needs.

If there is an issue with, for example, car parking, it should be addressed as such; it should not be addressed as an issue of concern for those who live in particular units. I am pleased that Antrim is a well-mixed and sharing town compared with many other large towns in Northern Ireland. I am proud to represent it as somewhere in which people with mental health problems and learning disabilities have been welcomed into the wider community. The important thing is that we continue to ensure that that remains the atmosphere for those with particular and different needs and that we continue to meet those needs.

Mr Clarke: It was interesting to listen to Mitchel McLaughlin's comments and find myself agreeing with most of what he said.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Examine your conscience.

Mr Girvan: Dangerous ground.

Mr Clarke: Obliterate that from Hansard. I would not want that to be publicly recorded. *[Laughter.]* All joking aside, his comments about people grabbing headlines and raising fears were well made. That has been the danger with this application from the outset. I probably come at this with a slightly different view on how the trust has identified residential areas — whether it is the trust or DSD that looks at houses in multiple occupation to suit housing demand. I believe that a good model and good example for the trust to look at in Antrim is located beside Enkalon, where a unit has been made to accommodate people with learning difficulties. Staffing economies can also be found there. We have what looks like a residential development, and more should be done to build on that example.

As has been said, we have hosted Holywell too long. I hasten to say that there are residents there who have wanted out for years. Danny organised a meeting for us with the trust a couple of weeks ago, at which it said that some of those people had been waiting to get out for almost 20 years. It is a travesty that people have been stuck in a location for 20 years longer than they should have just because they have learning difficulties. They

went in there for short-term treatment, have had their treatment and should have been back out to socialise with the wider public. Unfortunately, that has not been the case. I commend the Minister and his Department for the work that has been done to address that. That said, I still think that more effort should go into determining locations. We do not want to change the character of areas, but people should not be socially excluded from communities. That is important. The point was made by an official from the trust that we could be looking at someone who has family or relatives in the general area and that we should try to house that person in an area with familiar surroundings. That point was well made.

On the other side of the coin, many of us who have been representatives of the area for a few years have been lobbied by families who want to keep their relatives parked there, which is a travesty. They have been dependent on the facility that their loved ones have been in for too long. It is unfortunate that some would prefer for them to stay there, as opposed to allowing them enjoy a normal life outside in the community, given that the medical profession believes that they can integrate.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Will the Member give way?

Mr Clarke: I will.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank him for mentioning that. What I discovered there was interesting, although I know that it does not cover every circumstance: when parents are ageing, they are thinking about what would happen if they were to die. They then argue the case for retaining the long-stay at Muckamore, as opposed to, for them, the risk of staying in the community. I found that to be a major factor for that particular parents' group.

Mr Clarke: I appreciate the point that you make. The parents are bound to be ageing, given the time that some of the people have been in the facility. However, given that it has been an unknown quantum for so long, it should give peace of mind to the parents of the people who have been stopped there for so long to hear that we are going to resettle them in the community, with the package and the support that they need so that, when the parents pass on, they will do so knowing that their loved ones will be in a better place than the environment in which they have been living.

Danny made an interesting point about the consultation. I suppose that we can say that consultation is for consultation's sake. When can you consult enough? It is interesting that the organisations that wish to purchase the homes for the purpose did consult. We could have private landlords deciding to buy up houses in residential areas and changing them to multiple occupancy, regardless of the need, with no consultation. We are in the fortunate position that the organisations that are making accommodation to settle those people in residential areas have consulted and made the communities aware of their action plans.

As I said in my intervention to Danny, the fear generated and the spin that some people have put on the plan to create the monster that people think is going to happen has been disastrous. I think of the correspondence that I have had. People have even put in writing to us what they believe will happen. The only reason that they got that idea is that somebody put it out there in the first instance. That has been disastrous for the people who need resettled. Bear in mind that, when the plan pans out, those people will be settled in our community, and they will have a stigma before they even arrive. That is unfortunate, given what we heard from the departmental officials last week or the week before. None of the people they are talking about resettling in the community has any of the background that has been suggested. It is unfortunate that we are stigmatising individuals before we can even get them settled in the community. They are ordinary people who have had difficulties and have stayed too long in an institution. We need to get them settled back into the community, where they belong, but the very fact that that stigma has been attached to them is a travesty.

Hopefully the Minister will take on board some of the points that have been raised today and not only focus on residential areas but look at a model where we can have units like Oriel, I think it is called, in Antrim, opposite where the army barracks was, where they have made more accommodation. In blocks of accommodation like that, you can use the staff much more widely, but, at the same time, it gives residents the impression that they are living in a residential area, close to the town and facilities and away from the institution.

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for giving way. I entirely take his point about Oriel Lodge, but part of the issue is that we should also ensure that those who move from Muckamore Abbey Hospital to the likes of Oriel Lodge are also able to move on to more normal housing when they are able to do so.

Mr Clarke: Yes. I would never take away from that. I am making the point now because, if there are some people who are deemed to be worse than others, a choice may have to be made between Oriel Lodge-type accommodation or residential accommodation. However, people going into residential accommodation should not need 24-hour care and support when they get to that stage. That is one of the concerns that have been reflected in correspondence that I have received from some individuals. They deem those people to be worse because they need 24-hour care, without knowing the background of the individuals concerned. I hope that the public get the message that they have nothing to fear from these individuals, who need out of the institution.

Ms Brown: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, and I congratulate the Member on securing the debate. I speak as a Member for South Antrim, which is home to Muckamore Abbey Hospital, and as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

It is interesting and somewhat disturbing that, when this debate was first secured and meetings took place to discuss the issues that were to be raised, there was an alarming and worrying perception of what was meant by the proposal to rehome patients. Some of the concerns raised ranged from worries about the impact on property values to fears that convicted sex offenders would be moved into their neighbourhood, putting whole communities at risk. I mention that not to criticise those in the community — I understand their views — but to highlight the difficulties faced by all who have had to manage this transition and, in particular, the challenges faced by individual patients who are, perhaps, living through the most trying times of their already troubled life as they face major change. I would like to use the time

allowed to me to speak on behalf of those vulnerable people, who need our support.

I would like to simply pose this question: what does it say about us, as a society, if vulnerable individuals are labelled and unintentionally victimised by others who, sadly, have little or no understanding of the true situation or the policies behind it? I am a great believer in community spirit, no more so than in recent weeks, when I praised the people of Antrim for coming together to promote suicide awareness. In that instance, I called for a joined-up approach, asking the Department to harness the goodwill and energy that exists and turn it into something that benefits the whole community. Sadly, in this instance, I believe that the challenge to the Department is to work harder to encourage goodwill and properly explain the policy in an attempt to alleviate the fears and misconceptions that exist. I know that officials have attended meetings and I welcome that, but more must be done.

We have heard much talk in recent days about a shared future for Northern Ireland, and that conversation has tended to focus on rights and identity. However, we also need a shared future for health and social issues. The individuals whom we are talking about today are real people with real families and real lives. In the past, they have been sent to institutions where, for whatever reason, they have become forgotten and regarded as out of sight and, literally, out of mind. The House has a responsibility to those who are now coming forward after years of societal neglect. They are part of our society and should be entitled to feel part of our community. As some of the most vulnerable people in our care, they deserve not just compassion but representation in the House and in the policies that we promote.

I support the further development of care in the community for those with special needs. For too many years, those with learning disabilities were locked away in institutions. That was primarily because we, as a society, took pity on them, believing that that was the best form of care that we could offer. That, however, is no longer the case. Today, there is no reason why those with learning disabilities should not be offered the opportunity to lead a normal life. They no longer need our pity; they need our support. It is surely right that individuals are permitted to lead an independent life through supported living, rather than being marginalised.

Unfortunately, the legacy of hospitalising those with special needs has been far too many people being treated as inpatients. On average, those in hospital have been there for around 20 years. That is a staggering statistic, and, despite a policy to see them returned to the community to pursue an independently led life, around 250 individuals remain in care. I fully accept that this is an incredibly difficult situation, with many challenges and conflicting pressures. Each individual has different needs, and there is no easy solution. Therefore, we must implement a system that primarily caters for the needs of those at the heart of this issue, namely the patients or clients themselves. Some people will need to be placed in shared accommodation, as we have heard already, with a carer presentm but that option might not be applicable in every case. Whatever the circumstance, it is important that the individuals themselves are able to determine which arrangement is best for them.

This society has undergone so much change in recent years. However, all too often, we still see evident the stigmas associated with mental health and learning difficulties, and that must change. We must target some of the resources available at educating and promoting awareness of these matters if we are to see real change in attitudes. I urge the Minister and his officials to look at that as a matter of priority.

6.00 pm

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have a speech, but I do not intend to use it. I will just respond to the issues that have been raised.

First of all, I am disappointed that the debate has come before the House. It reflects a regressive and backward approach that I do not want to be associated with in any way, shape or form. A society is judged on how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable. A number of years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Romania. In that society, many youngsters with learning difficulties were institutionalised and abandoned. I visited some of those facilities, and I found an appalling situation. We associate that with the Ceausescu regime in Romania. In Northern Ireland, we have had long-stay institutions, and they are nothing like what was in Romania. However, I do not want our people, our community and our loved ones with learning disabilities to be put in long-stay institutions. I want them to be part of our community.

When I go into local shops and restaurants where learning disabled people are employed, I am more inclined to go back to those facilities, because I recognise that they recognise that those people are part of our community and need our support, and they are giving them jobs. I go up to the cinema and see a fellow who I am very friendly with cleaning there. He lives in his own accommodation, and he has a learning disability. You know what? That is really good. I do not want a society in which we put people away in institutions. I want a society where we value, care for, love and show affection to people who have a learning disability.

I hear the suggestion, “We do not want these people living in our area because they could be sex offenders”. There are more people with a learning disability who have been the victim of sexual abuse than the other way around. I hear, “We do not want these mentally ill dangerous people”. Again, people with a learning disability or, indeed, a disability of any kind are far more vulnerable and likely to be attacked than the other way around. Recently we had that case in Lisburn, where young Scott Vineer, an autistic lad, was beaten to a pulp and left for days. Thankfully, Scott continues to make progress, albeit slowly. He is headed in the right direction after that brutal attack by so-called normal people. I do not want to be associated with that. I do not want to be associated with people who say that this will have a negative impact on house prices and that surely cheaper housing could be obtained with public money. I want our learning disabled community to be a fully integrated part of our community, where people who have a learning disability can be cherished and we can share our space, facilities and community with them.

I accept that, in all of this, we have a job of work to properly inform communities when these things happen. We have a number of learning disabled facilities in Lisburn. We have some wider communities where there is greater

support and larger numbers of groups together. We also have individual bungalows and residential care homes. There is a cocktail of facilities and a mixture available, and that should be the case right across Northern Ireland.

Let me say this: you cannot choose your neighbours. I suspect that, in these instances, people will find that the learning disabled community are good neighbours. There is a far greater potential for much more difficult neighbours who will hold noisy parties and have cars leaving late at night, taxis calling and all that goes with that than people will get with any learning disabled neighbours that they might have.

I thank all those who took part in the debate. What has been said has been largely constructive. I will take on board issues that were raised, particular the issue of ensuring that homes are the same as every other home and that stupidly large fences are not put up. I often see six-foot fences around people's homes. That does not seem to be unreasonable, where it is appropriate, but I do not see any need whatsoever for putting up ridiculous things because someone happens to be autistic. I want to see things done appropriately and properly.

I will fully conform with what Bamford has requested and recommended. He has brought expert views to the table. I will drive the Bamford review forward and ensure that people from the learning disabled community have the opportunity to fully integrate into society. I have passed Muckamore on the school bus when out on school trips and heard stupid comments being made by young people who did not know any better. It is regrettable that we have adults today making stupid comments when they should know better.

Adjourned at 6.06 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 18 February 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

Beef Contamination

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise for the delay in getting the statement into Members' pigeonholes this morning.

With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I wish to make a statement to update Members on the discovery of equine DNA in beef products. First, I would like to take this opportunity to make it clear once again that this has nothing to do with the high-quality, fully traceable beef produced here in the North. My Department delivers meat hygiene official controls on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in approved slaughterhouses and other establishments. Senior officials from the Department and the FSA maintain regular formal and informal contact to ensure consistent and effective delivery to the agreed standard, and the FSA performs regular checks and independent audits to ensure the quality of work delivered on its behalf. My departmental inspectors enforce regulations that provide customers with assurance about the origin of beef in abattoirs and approved cutting plants. We carry out extensive controls on the traceability of beef and beef products, mainly mince, both fresh and frozen, in abattoirs and approved cutting plants across the North. It is on that basis that I am confident of the high quality, safety and full traceability of beef that is born, raised and slaughtered here in the North, and I have openly and often stated that position since the beginning of this incident.

The FSA was made aware of the results of a Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) authenticity study of a range of meat products on 14 January 2013. This was a small survey conducted as part of the FSAI's routine monitoring programme of the labelling of foods and was specifically to check the type of animal species in meat products. The survey results showed that a number of beefburger products manufactured in Britain and the South contained horse and pig DNA. The FSA in the North informed my Department of the issue on the evening of 15 January 2013. The FSA launched an urgent investigation into the issues highlighted in the survey and initiated a four-point plan for the investigation. This is being implemented by the FSA in conjunction with the food industry and other Departments, including my Department and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and includes the following: to continue the urgent review of the traceability of the food products identified in the FSAI's survey; to explore further, in conjunction with the FSAI, the methodology used for the survey to understand more clearly the factors that may have led to the low-level cases of cross-contamination; to consider, in conjunction with relevant local authorities and the FSAI, whether any legal action is appropriate following the investigation; and to work with DEFRA, the devolved rural affairs Departments and local authorities across Britain and in the North on a food authenticity survey on processed meat products.

All the FSA's intelligence is being fed into the European Commission through the rapid alert system for food and feed. As you will be aware, this has become a pan-European investigation. An intense investigation into the traceability is still under way, and the FSA is working closely with the respective authorities.

This is a very serious issue, and evidence points to either gross negligence or deliberate contamination of the food chain. For that reason, the FSA is working closely with police forces across Ireland and Europe. Indeed, a number of arrests have already been made in Britain.

The situation is developing at pace. The response between Departments in the North has been co-ordinated through the food and feed incident management group chaired by my Chief Veterinary Officer. To date, that group has met three times: on 17 January, 1 February and 8 February. More meetings are planned in the coming days. A number of retailers both in the South and here in the North have withdrawn potentially affected products from sale. The FSA has carried out a comprehensive risk assessment of the food safety risks associated with this incident, and its advice is that the risk to human health from burgers in which equine DNA was detected is likely to be very low if the products are cooked thoroughly and if general food hygiene practices are followed. On Sunday 10 February 2013, the FSA issued interim advice to public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, as well as to caterers and consumers purchasing from retailers, in the light of the developing nature of the incident. Food businesses have been tasked with conducting authenticity tests on all beef products for the presence of significant levels of horse meat. Of the just over 2,500 samples of processed beef products tested, 29 were found to contain horse meat. All those products had already been removed from supermarket shelves by the time of the announcement on Friday.

Last week I met the FSA on several occasions to be updated on its investigations, and I met representatives of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland. On Wednesday, I met representatives of the main supermarkets here in the North. I emphasised to them the quality and traceability of beef from the North and encouraged them to source

their products locally. On 14 February, eight cases of horse meat contaminated with bute were identified in an abattoir in Britain. Two of the carcasses were retained at the abattoir, and the others were sent to France. Three of those have been traced, and work is ongoing to identify the whereabouts of the others. Since 2011, 21 samples have been tested in the North for the presence of bute, and none of them has tested positive.

Mr Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to bring Members up to date, and I assure you that my officials are working tirelessly to protect the beef industry in the North. I intend to ensure that the FSA continues to require supermarkets to maintain their responsibility to provide their customers with assurance on the authenticity of their beef products by continuing to carry out surveillance for species. I will also want assurances that traceability of the raw materials continues from the fresh meat sector through to the processing sector. It is important that a system is put in place to ensure that horizon scanning for future potential problems is improved. I wish to investigate further the proposal from Safefood to have a neutral environment where information can be placed anonymously. I will ensure that Members are kept informed of progress by way of regular updates.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): Many members of the public believe that the large supermarkets have got off lightly on this issue and that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has not done enough to highlight supermarkets' responsibility in this regard. In the Minister's conversations with the supermarkets, has she stressed to them the part that they have played in this debacle? Can she give us an assurance about the quality of food and the price in supermarkets? We all believe that supermarkets have played a part in pushing down prices and that that has led to some of these issues. Has she defended the County Down processing firm that has unfairly lost a contract with Asda, which some would say is unwarranted? The reputation of the food industry here must be protected. Can the Minister assure us that all cold stores in Northern Ireland have been checked for horse meat? Has any further horse meat been found?

Mrs O'Neill: The Chair of the Agriculture Committee will be aware that this is an ongoing investigation and that the findings of a number of tests are still to come. We had the results of the industry tests on Friday, but we also expect the results of further tests that environmental health officers are carrying out at the request of the Food Standards Agency. I am led to believe that those are due to be reported on by the first week in April. Until we have those results, it is hard to give the assurances that the Member talks about.

This is a massive consumer confidence issue. I put the case very strongly to representatives of independent supermarkets and the larger multi-retail companies. My very strong message to them was that they need to source locally and that this cannot have any impact on the farming community, because our local farmers are not involved in the investigation. Our local farmers are totally distinct from it, which involves processed food. There is a genuine fear in the farming community that, as a result of what is happening, future costs will be put on to it. I will stand strong with them to make sure that no costs are passed on to them, given that they are not involved in the situation. There is an onus on processors and supermarkets. I have made that point very firmly over the past number of weeks, and I will continue to make it. Processors and supermarkets have a responsibility to consumers to make sure that they get what is on the packet and on the label, and they have a responsibility to assure the public that their products are safe. Farmers have to jump through hoops for farm quality assurance systems. They must ensure that they live up to all the required practices before they can put a logo on a product that they can stand over. Why should processors and supermarkets not have to do exactly the same?

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement and for all that she has said for the farming industry. She has stuck up for it robustly. However, the message must go out today that you support the call from the farming industry that no cost should come down the line to the farmer.

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I absolutely support that call from the farming industry. Our local produce is fully traceable, and it has integrity and safety. Given that they are not involved in the investigation, local farmers should not have to take on any costs that come as a result of further tests. Our farming industry needs to be treated separately in this instance. It already adheres to very high standards, and I fully support it.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement, which, as she said, arrived very late with us. It is abundantly clear that a major exercise is required to restore consumer confidence. Will she commit to spearheading that exercise to ensure that the local industry, especially our farmers, is not irreparably damaged by the revelations, which now come almost daily?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that the reason that I have been so public on the issue, even though the Food Standards Agency is taking the lead in the investigation, is that I am concerned about the damage that the investigation is causing to the local farming community's reputation. That is why I have to be very vocal about it and why I have to keep repeating the message that our local produce is safe, is traceable and has integrity. I will continue to promote that message to protect the local farming industry. The confidence issue will be resolved only as a result of a thorough investigation. The Food Standards Agency has a role to play in the completion of the investigation in as speedy a manner as possible. The investigation needs to be robust. It is now a European issue, and there are ongoing investigations at different levels. Either we are dealing with criminality — we have seen some arrests, which I support — or there is gross negligence that needs to be exposed. Those are the only ways in which we will restore public confidence. I assure the Member that I will continue to carry out my role in promoting and supporting the local farming industry.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her statement. It is very important that the statement be made, because the longer that the saga goes on without an official statement in the House, the more the wider public is concerned.

When was the issue first raised? Is it the case that it first arose in a cold store in Newry back in September and that it took a long time before the FSAI formally raised the issue publicly? How secure or otherwise is full traceability from the farm gate to the finished product on the shelf?

Does the Minister accept that another system, developed by Dr Ken Baird, might be worth considering to achieve full traceability from the farm gate to the consumer?

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm to the Member that the Food Standards Agency first alerted us to the fact that there was an incident in a local company on 1 February this year. We were first alerted to the original situation in the South by the FSAI on 15 January. We have been regularly involved with the FSA and engaging with it since that time. I am led to believe that there was an investigation by the FSA and that environmental health officers from the local council were involved. It is important to reiterate that none of that foodstuff entered the food chain, and it is important that we get that message out.

12.15 pm

I have been very clear in saying that local traceability is second to none. That also needs to be applied in the processing sector. If there is already a way to do that, it should be exposed and that should be the lesson learned from this investigation. The major retailers and the processors have a duty of care to the consumer to make sure that they can stand over their products. Until such time as processed foods are also fully traceable, it will be very difficult to restore consumer confidence.

Mr McCarthy: I welcome the Minister's statement. Does she agree that the longer this goes on, the more difficult it is for confidence to be instilled in the whole industry? I welcome her defence of the Northern Irish agriculture industry. However, does she agree that there has been too much buck passing, which seems to continue every week? The sooner someone takes responsibility for what has happened, the sooner we will get back to doing what we do best in Northern Ireland, which is producing meat that people want to purchase. I say that not as a meat eater but as a vegetarian, but fully supportive of the Northern Irish agriculture industry.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. From the very start, I have said clearly that the Food Standards Agency is taking the lead in the investigation. If you want to know where the buck stops, that is it. We have been very sure to challenge the FSA on its role in the investigation to make sure that it is robust. I am coming at this purely from the point of view that reputational damage is being caused to the local farming industry. That is why it is important that we continue, as an Assembly and as an Executive, to send out the message that we support local produce, that it is fully traceable, that it has integrity and that it is safe. The Food Standards Agency is the lead body. I have issues with the fact that the Food Standards Agency is not accountable to the Assembly, but that is an argument for another day. At this moment, we need to get to the crux of the investigation and have everything exposed. We can have the conversation about FSA accountability at another stage.

Mr Irwin: Does the Minister agree that it is important that it is made clearer where food comes from and that country-of-origin labelling should be a priority, given that the housewife needs to know exactly where her food comes from?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely. The provenance issue is at the core of this. Let us be very clear: this is a traceability issue. The fact is that there is no traceability in the processing sector, and we need to get to the bottom of that. Everybody has to play their role in giving consumer confidence to the households who purchase the products. We will continue to do that.

Mr Clarke: The Minister will be aware that the Agriculture Committee heard from officials from her Department and the FSA last week. They told us that there was never any suggestion — it was never on their radar — that horse meat was in abattoirs or was being used for food products. Can the Minister explain why, as she said in her statement, since 2011, 21 samples in Northern Ireland have been tested for the presence of bute? Given that it is used only in horses, why was there testing for it?

Mrs O'Neill: That is like saying that you should ignore a problem until it exists. You should always be prudent in looking for potential threats to the food chain. That is why the vets take very seriously their role in abattoirs in carrying out tests. If the Member is suggesting that you sit back and do not do anything until a problem arises, that is not a prudent way to do business.

Mr Beggs: The Minister has spoken about the responsibility of the supermarkets to maintain customer assurance on meat products. Does the Minister agree that, the shorter the supply chain, the greater the control and the smaller the risk? Does she agree that local butchers can play an important role in providing that assurance? Does she also agree that, if supermarkets choose to use a variety of suppliers, they risk their future business and that greater control and genuine knowledge of the source of meat are essential?

Mrs O'Neill: I fully agree with the Member that the whole food supply chain is a complicated process, and the more stages that are involved in that, the harder it is when it comes to investigations. I put the point very clearly to the major supermarkets and to the independent supermarkets that I encourage them to source their products locally. That shortens that supply chain, and that is far more beneficial to the public, so I encourage that to happen.

Lord Morrow: I wonder if the Minister will brief us on what discussions she has had with her counterpart in the South of Ireland. Will she also tell us to what extent Greencore is supplying here in Northern Ireland, bearing in mind that its chief executive is Mr Patrick Coveney, who is a brother of the Agriculture Minister in the South of Ireland? Is it not true that, in fact, ABP supplied food to Greencore, which, in turn, supplied our schools here? Will the Minister tell us if that practice is still going on, and what action does she intend taking to further investigate that situation?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not think that it is a time for political grandstanding, but I am happy to advise the Member of the discussions that I have had with Minister Coveney, Owen Paterson and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers. Those discussions have been ongoing, and we have had two teleconferences in the past week with Owen Paterson and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers. It is important that we continue to discuss the matter. The week prior to that, I had discussions with Simon Coveney, and I will continue to do so. This is a European issue. It is right across the board, and we will have to continue to talk. Investigations are going on at local level and at European level. I am going to Brussels next Monday, where there will be an agriculture commission meeting. There will be an opportunity for everybody who is involved to sit around

and have a discussion on the lessons that have been learned, what else needs to be done in terms of consumer confidence and what else can be done to support the supply chain.

In respect of Greencore and who it is supplying, you should put that question to the Food Standards Agency. I am happy to pass on to the Member any details that I have in respect of — *[Interruption.]* The Food Standards Agency is in the lead in the investigation. You can choose to nod your head all you want, but that is the reality. They published a list last week of the companies that they have been supplying into, and, regardless of who is involved in any of the companies, if there is any criminality or fraud involved, that should be exposed, and it should be dealt with by the full rigour of the law. I have consistently made that point, and I will consistently continue to make that point, regardless of who is involved in any of these situations. This certainly is a European issue, and it needs European investigation. As I said, I stand over the fact that anybody who is involved in fraudulent activity needs to be brought before the courts.

The Minister of Education made an announcement last week around schools, and I encourage the Member to look at that.

Mr Storey: Following on from the Minister's comments in relation to the Education Minister, in that statement there was no reference to the supply chain in terms of contracts emanating outside Northern Ireland. What discussions has the Minister of Agriculture had with the Education Minister to ensure that there are no contracts that are currently supplying schools in Northern Ireland that emanate out of the Irish Republic or any other jurisdiction in which there has been a clearly identified problem? Can she, without trying to pass the buck or trying to pass the blame on to somebody else, give us a clear answer? Clearly, she did not answer Lord Morrow's question.

Mrs O'Neill: Let me be very clear: the Food Standards Agency is in the lead in this investigation. Throw your head up or choose to ignore it, but that is the reality. I encourage the Member, as Chair of the Education Committee, to have a conversation with the Education Minister.

Mr Storey: I have.

Mrs O'Neill: Well, you asked me the question. On Friday, I had a meeting with the Education Minister. He had a thorough discussion, which he found very useful, with the Food Standards Agency around all these issues. He has a job in respect of the education of children and school meals being provided. He asked a number of questions of the Food Standards Agency, and I know that he sought some assurances. I encourage you again to have that conversation with the Education Minister in your role as Chairperson of the Committee. He sought assurances from the Food Standards Agency because it is in the lead in this investigation.

Mr Allister: Now that, five weeks on, the Minister has belatedly come to the House on these issues and in the hope that she will get to grips with matters that threaten the stability of our vital agrifood sector, can I ask her what specific measures, not platitudes, she intends to take to ring-fence our blameless red meat producers from collateral damage? What steps will she take to deal with her porous horse passport system?

Mrs O'Neill: Maybe the Member has not been following developments. This is an evolving situation. I have consistently made the point that the local farming industry is not involved. I come at this situation from the point of view of wanting to protect the reputation of the food production system in the North of Ireland, which is fully traceable with high standards and total integrity. I will continue to make that point and encourage all Members to make that point.

The horse passport issue is a discussion for another day. It has been highlighted around horse welfare, and people have made public statements on horses in the last number of weeks. Anything that has come to the Department has been fully investigated. There is nothing in the evidence that has come forward to suggest anything untoward at this moment in time, but I am happy to fully investigate any horse welfare issues that come forward. The Member will be aware that the horse passport scheme is an EU scheme that was rolled out across Europe. It came in here in 2010. A review of the scheme in 2011 identified no major deficiencies. That said, I assured the Equine Council for the North of Ireland at a recent meeting that my officials will work with it to bring about any improvements that we can to the horse passport scheme in the North of Ireland, and I am committed to doing that.

Mr McNarry: I recognise that the Minister speaks for the farmers. Is she satisfied with the speed of reaction and subsequent co-operation on this matter by retailers with her and her Department? Can she assure the House that products currently for sale from retailers do not contain horse meat? Can she tell the House that retailers are standing over products on the shelves today and that they will cause no fear for the consumer? That is a different question from her ongoing investigations that she talked about today. This is about consumer confidence today in the shop. Will the Minister give the House an assurance that, when a person goes to the shop today, no matter where it is, to buy a product with beef in it, the consumer can be comfortable that that product has no horse meat in it?

Mrs O'Neill: I will give an assurance on the local produce because that is the assurance that I can give.

Mr McNarry: No, you have to do better than that.

Mrs O'Neill: That is —

Mr Speaker: Order. You must allow the Minister to answer.

Mrs O'Neill: I can give an assurance on local produce because that is what I am responsible for. That is the system that I am responsible for, and I will stand over it. Local produce is safe, traceable, transparent and is there for all to see. If there is a "Farm quality assured" stamp on it, it is safe and can be stood over. I cannot stand over processed food. I am not responsible for processed food. The food processing companies are responsible to DETI. The Food Standards Agency is taking the lead in this investigation and is answerable through the Health Department.

I will continue to separate out those roles because that is important. I will stand over what I can, which is local produce, and I will continue to do that. All we have to go on around processed food and horse meat in processed food is that the Chief Medical Officer in England said that it was safe to eat. That is the only advice that we can go on. She

has made that call consistently. Apart from that, I could not give an assurance, but the Chief Medical Officer gave that assurance, and I can only trust that judgement given that she is an expert in her field.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. Given that the free trade dynamics of the EU food supply chain played a significant role in the recent failure of confidence in the supply chain, what steps will the Minister take to engage with Brussels and our MEPs in the weeks ahead to put this issue to bed?

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

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, this clearly is a European issue now, and it is important that we continue to engage with the MEPs. I am going to Brussels next Monday for the European agriculture commission, and I also intend to try to meet MEPs when we are there. The investigation is going on at local level but also at European level, where a full Europol investigation is under way. We need to be on top of all those things and continue to engage at local level but also at European level. I assure the Member that I am committed to doing that.

12.30 pm

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, to move the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to group the seven clauses of the Bill for the Question on stand part, followed by four schedules and the long title.

Clauses 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 4 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I beg to move

> *That the draft Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.*

I am seeking the Assembly's approval of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013. The order designates a number of organisations to sit on all policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) across Northern Ireland and on the four district policing and community safety partnerships (DPCSPs) in Belfast.

I propose the designation of the following organisations: the Police Service of Northern Ireland; the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; the Probation Board; the Youth Justice Agency; health and social care trusts, excepting the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service; education and library boards; and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. I am pleased to be able to bring the order before the Assembly, since it marks an important milestone in the establishment and operation of policing and community safety partnerships.

When I made provision for the establishment of PCSPs in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, my aim was to make our community safer. The partnerships have brought together and built on the work of the previous district policing partnerships (DPPs) and community safety partnerships. Overseeing their work is a joint committee consisting of representatives from my Department and the Policing Board.

PCSPs are designed to play a key role in building confidence in the justice system and ensuring that members of the community are empowered to help develop solutions to tackle crime, the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour. They will be expected to contribute at a local level to the achievement of Northern Ireland-wide targets set in the Programme for Government, as well as to deliver on the vision outlined in the community safety strategy and the objectives detailed in the policing plan. The partnerships are working to ensure a joined-up approach to policing and community safety issues, developing holistic solutions to issues identified by local people and making a real difference on the ground.

It is, of course, early days. However, I hope that PCSPs will be able to step up to the mark in difficult circumstances and give the leadership needed to address community safety issues in local communities, through identifying problems, developing solutions, taking action and judging and learning from the results. We have already seen some recent examples of PCSPs responding to the needs of local communities. One notable example is from Omagh. Following the tragic death of Jason McGovern, Omagh PCSP is taking forward a range of targeted initiatives to improve town centre safety, co-ordinating with a range of bodies to develop a holistic response to those local issues.

One of the new features of PCSPs that will enhance the effectiveness of such joint working is that of designation. That feature was designed to formally recognise the contribution that statutory and voluntary and community organisations can make to enhancing community safety. In practice, it means that those bodies will be fully immersed in the work of the partnerships, delivering with other partners to improve community safety. They will, as part of the PCSP, work to engage with the community to identify issues of local concern, develop plans and take action as needed. I believe it to be extremely positive that that responsibility will not simply lie with the police, as had tended to be the case previously in DPPs.

The Justice Act includes two types of designation. The first is local designation, where each PCSP can select bodies that might potentially assist them in meeting their local objectives. Those bodies can hold membership of the PCSP and contribute to the partnership's planning and delivery. The second type of designation came about as a result of a Justice Committee amendment during the passage of the Justice Bill. It enabled my Department to list, in an order, a number of organisations that would be obliged to provide representation on all PCSPs across Northern Ireland. In my view, this represented a strengthening of the original provision for local designation, and I was happy to support it.

I thank the Justice Committee for its careful consideration of designation issues and for its ongoing input as we develop the final designation order. It is with the Committee's support that I bring this order before the House today.

The bodies that Members see listed in the draft order represent the culmination of a wide-ranging consultation exercise undertaken by my Department, with support from the Policing Board. The Justice Act required consultation with all PCSPs prior to the development of the order, and the formal consultation on the seven bodies listed in the order closed in August of last year.

During the consultation process, it was clear that PCSPs recognised the importance of having representatives from a broad range of sectors working together to develop local solutions. The majority of respondents stated that the bodies listed were appropriate for designation because of their potential to play a key role in improving community safety across Northern Ireland. In my view, the order is crucial. It provides PCSPs with a level of consistency and ensures that the key players in the arena of community safety are involved across the board.

Prior to formal consultation with PCSPs, departmental and Policing Board representatives met representatives of a range of bodies identified through consultation as potential designated bodies. The seven bodies listed in the order were keen to get involved from the outset and recognised that the benefits of designation were mutual: they would help PCSPs to deliver on their strategic objectives; and the work of the PCSPs would link in to their own organisational objectives.

Many of the bodies have already become involved in the work of PCSPs on a voluntary basis. They are getting to grips with local issues and are ready for the responsibility that the order will place upon them. Indeed, they welcome the formalisation of their contribution in this way.

I want to emphasise the importance of ensuring that those who can make our communities safer, do so, and do so in partnership. We must bear in mind that strong partnership working is integral to delivering the improvements that we want to the quality of life in local communities in every

part of Northern Ireland. The order is only one part of the picture, but it is an important one. It will allow PCSPs to deliver holistic solutions for local people. I urge the House to support the motion.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): The origin of this draft statutory rule, which the Minister of Justice brings to the Assembly for approval today, comes from the work of the first Justice Committee in the previous mandate, when it considered the establishment of the policing and community safety partnerships as part of the provisions contained in the 2010 Justice Bill. That Committee looked at the establishment of PCSPs in some detail and took oral evidence on those particular clauses from 21 organisations at a stakeholder event. I commend those who were on the Committee at that time. It was ably chaired by my colleague Lord Morrow, and it looked at this in some detail. I know that a number of its members subsequently moved on, but it carried out an important piece of work. I think that it is important that we put that, and our appreciation, on the record.

Part of the Committee's deliberations on the clauses related to the size and composition of PCSP membership. It was the Committee's clear view, strongly supported during the oral evidence event, that there was merit in designating a small number of named organisations, such as the Probation Board, to be represented on all PCSPs to ensure a consistent level of skills and expertise across the partnerships, rather than leaving it entirely to each PCSP to decide for itself which organisations should be represented on it.

The Committee's preferred approach to achieving this was to require the Department of Justice to produce a regulation listing the proposed designated organisations to be approved by the Assembly. It was the Committee's view that such a regulation would place the decision-making in the hands of the Assembly, and the Committee believed that to be the most appropriate place for it. Given that no agreement was reached between the Committee and the Minister on this during Committee Stage of the Justice Bill, the Committee tabled appropriate amendments at Consideration Stage, and these were supported by the Assembly. The regulation provided for by the Committee's amendments is before the House today.

The current Justice Committee was briefed by departmental officials on the proposal for the regulation in October of last year and considered the draft statutory rule in January 2013. The Committee has agreed that it is content that the designated organisations in the regulation, which, as the Minister outlined, include the PSNI, the Probation Board and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, will bring a broad range of experience and expertise to the partnerships and will contribute to enhancing community safety on the ground.

The Committee looks forward to seeing the Department draw up guidance on developing the role of the designated bodies, and it has asked for clarification regarding the protocols that are in place between the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which will be represented on the PCSPs, and the housing associations, which will not, on sharing information that is relevant to each partnership's work. The Committee also welcomes the Department's intention to make provision for organisations, such as the Public Prosecution Service and Roads Service, which are not in the list of designated organisations, to engage and contribute to the work of PCSPs as necessary on issues of local concern.

At its meeting on 31 January 2013, the Committee agreed to recommend that the draft statutory rule be approved. I will support the motion today. Echoing the Minister's comments, I believe that this is a welcome development. I think that PCSPs and the way in which they have been formulated have enhanced the role that they can play in our community. Certainly, concern was growing that, sitting in isolation, district policing partnerships and different community safety partnerships did not operate as effectively as they could. The joined-up approach now is the best way to try to deliver on issues that, ultimately, affect all our local communities. We trust that those organisations will be able to play an important role in that.

I will now speak in my capacity as an individual Member. We have a degree of concern. I know that, in the first year of operation, these statutory organisations will not have voting rights. Obviously, that could, ultimately, change. We will be keen to review how that relationship is established between the statutory bodies, people who are appointed as independent members and political representatives to ensure that they work properly together. We will await the outworkings of its first year of operation. We may then have a view about the appropriateness or otherwise of the voting rights being extended and added to those organisations. Certainly, I commend and support the motion.

Mr G Kelly: I am not on the Committee for Justice, but I am a member of the Policing Board and happen to be the chairperson of its community engagement committee. For that reason, I thought that it was appropriate to say a few words on the motion.

For all the reasons that the Minister and the Chair of the Committee covered, I welcome the statutory rule that is being brought forward. I think that it is crucial to having community engagement at the core of policing, and it is excellent that the designated bodies actually have a duty to attend. I agree with the comments of the Member who spoke previously on — well, I do not know whether we agree. However, the fact that the seven designated bodies agreed not to use their voting power during the first year in testing was a great move forward by all of them and reflects the ability to negotiate the matter with them.

There is a duty to attend. It is, if you like, an extension of a multi-agency approach that has been seen to work on the ground in a number of areas, including north Belfast. For that reason, I am delighted that we are at the point where agencies are coming forward and assisting in that in holding the police to account. As the Minister said, the police have said that, very often, they are the organisation that is held to account, but many other statutory bodies should be involved with community safety and other issues. I think that the partnership bodes well for the future. I support it.

Mr Ford: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure that you will be delighted to know that I do not intend to make a lengthy speech. I thank the Committee Chair for his positive comments. I confirm to him that guidance is being developed for the way in which the partnerships will operate and for the role of the designated organisations and that we will review voting rights at the end of the first

year of operation. I welcome Gerry Kelly's contribution. As he said, he is the co-chair of the joint committee between the Department and the Policing Board. I echo his comments about the necessity for joined-up partnership working. I thank the House not only for its agreement this morning but for the lengthy and detailed work that has been done in the Policing Board and the Committee to get the order right. I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

12.45 pm

Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is a motion to approve a statutory rule.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

> *That the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.*

I seek to introduce the aforementioned statutory rule, which will, subject to the Assembly's approval, specify the standards for commercial dog-breeding establishments and introduce a new licensing system for such establishments. Before I go into the detail of the regulations, I will briefly explain to Members the background to them.

The current regulations covering dog-breeding establishments are the Dogs (Breeding Establishments and Guard Dog Kennels) Regulations 1983. The regulations were made under the Dogs Order 1983, which focuses on dog control as opposed to dog welfare. The 1983 regulations set out the information that must be supplied to a council for the registration of a dog-breeding establishment and specify the conditions under which such establishments must be constructed and operated. Although the 1983 regulations provide basic welfare standards for accommodation, they do not contain any specific welfare controls for bitches, dogs or pups.

Prior to the Welfare of Animals Bill being introduced in the Assembly in June 2010, there were calls from elected representatives and members of the public to bring forward new legislation to stop so-called puppy farming. In addition, during the Bill's passage through the Assembly, there were also calls from a number of MLAs to stop puppy farming and to specify in the Bill the welfare standards for dog-breeding establishments. However, the level of detail required to do that was considered excessive for primary legislation. My predecessor, Michelle Gildernew, therefore gave an assurance to the Assembly that one of the first pieces of subordinate legislation to be made under the new Welfare of Animals Act 2011 would concern dog-breeding establishments. Bringing the draft regulations before the House today honours that commitment.

The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 will regulate the commercial breeding of dogs and provide commercial dog breeders with specified standards that are intended to maintain and, where necessary, improve the welfare of breeding dogs throughout their breeding life. The regulations will not apply to hobby breeders who breed the odd litter of pups to maintain good bloodlines in a show dog or a good working strain in, for example, a gun dog or a sheepdog.

The regulations will introduce a new definition for breeding establishments with an associated licence to operate such an establishment and a related licence fee; provide an exemption for licensed dog-breeding establishments

from the existing requirement to have a block licence under the Dogs Order; make it a mandatory requirement to microchip all bitches, dogs and pups in the establishment; introduce conditions that must be complied with under the terms of the licence, including controls on the age and the number of litters that a bitch can breed, the minimum age at which a pup can be sold or transferred, and written socialisation and enrichment plans for pups and bitches in the establishment; and provide an exemption for registered hunt clubs, providing that they do not sell dogs or pups, and one for registered charities, providing that they do not breed dogs.

It is important for Members to know that, before the regulations were drafted, my officials visited a number of registered breeding establishments here and in England to help inform development of the policy. The establishments here range from small establishments with fewer than 10 breeding bitches to a large establishment with 400 to 500 breeding bitches. Standards in those establishments vary considerably, from what could be described as Rolls-Royce models to those barely meeting the minimum standards set in the 1983 regulations. The visits were very informative and helped improve my officials' understanding of the difficulties faced by breeders and the issues that needed to be addressed.

A 12-week public consultation was undertaken on the draft regulations, and it ended on 10 January last year. The consultation issued to over 2,000 stakeholders, including 242 registered breeders and 1,214 block licence holders. My Department received 610 responses, 90 of which were substantive responses and 520 of which were letters supporting the response from one group of breeders.

The consultation responses came from a diverse range of stakeholders, and a wide spectrum of opinion was expressed in the responses, with many conflicting views. Overall, however, the draft regulations were welcomed by the majority of the 90 stakeholders who submitted substantive responses, and there was significant support for the vast majority of the proposals.

However, the breeders' group that had 520 letters supporting its response expressed concern generally about the legislative proposals and about the draft guidance for council enforcement officers, which was also subject to consultation. It stated its opposition to the new regulations, preferring to the keep the current regulations made under the Dogs Order 1983, and to build on and reinforce them rather than introduce new legislation under the 2011 Act. It did not agree with the proposals to license a dog-breeding establishment or the introduction of a licence fee. It suggested that the current block licence, which is issued under the Dogs Order, be retained. It also expressed its opposition to many of the proposed conditions of a licence, such as whelping facilities; socialisation of pups; mating conditions; microchipping, particularly for pups going for export; first registration by the breeder of the pup on the microchip database; records to be kept by breeders; and the suspension of appeals procedures.

As I stated earlier, although the Dogs (Breeding Establishment and Guard Dog Kennels) Regulations under the Dogs Order were fit for purpose when made in 1983, they do not provide the welfare standards that we expect in the 21st century. Therefore, I do not consider it a viable option to keep the 1983 regulations under the Welfare of Animals Act.

I have considered all other points that were raised by stakeholders. Where practical, I have tried to address as many of their concerns as possible. However, in addressing stakeholder concerns, both from welfare organisations and dog breeders, I have had to ensure that the new regulations do not become watered down and meaningless, but clearly set out the welfare standards that commercial breeding establishments must adhere to.

As a result of the consultation responses and subsequent scrutiny by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I have made a number of significant changes to the draft regulations, including changes to the definition of "breeding establishment". In the consultation, one of the key elements in defining a commercial breeding establishment was a person who keeps three or more breeding bitches and breeds two or more litters of puppies in any 12-month period. Most stakeholders did not agree with the proposed definition, and were of the view that hobby breeders should be allowed to breed three litters each year before being required to be licensed as a commercial breeder.

To take account of the majority of stakeholders' comments and to ensure that very small breeders did not face new licensing costs, I have increased from two to three the number of litters that may be bred each year before a breeding establishment licence is required.

In the consultation, it was a proposed that a bitch could breed only one litter of pups in any 12-month period and could not be bred after she reached eight years of age. Although a wide range of stakeholders supported those conditions, valid comments were received from dog breeders that they were too restrictive and not financially viable. For example, greyhounds can be raced until they are five or six years of age, and, under the proposals, could therefore breed only two or three litters before they reach eight years of age. In a bid to take on board those comments while still protecting the welfare of the breeding bitch, I have amended the conditions to allow a bitch to give birth to three litters in three years as long as the bitch is not bred in any consecutive heat period. That takes account of bitches that come into heat less than every six months. In addition, a bitch can be bred after six years of age if, on each occasion, a veterinary surgeon certifies that the bitch is in good health to breed.

I have also removed the requirement to have an older bitch or dog spayed or neutered before rehoming. Although I would prefer that those older bitches and dogs are not bred again when they retire from the breeding establishment, it is, on balance, better that the dogs and bitches that are suitable for rehoming as family pets are rehomed as opposed to being put down because of the cost of neutering. I have reduced the mandatory record-keeping requirements that a breeding establishment must retain to the minimum required to allow an inspector to assess compliance with the regulations. I have retained the requirement for all pups to be microchipped before they leave the breeder. It is crucial that pups can be traced back to the breeder, irrespective of whether they go to a new owner in England or remain in the North. Microchipping will allow that to happen.

The draft regulations are fit for purpose. I am pleased to say that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, as part of its scrutiny role, thoroughly examined them. It undertook its own stakeholder engagement and visited a number of breeding establishments. My officials have worked with the Committee to ensure that we now have workable regulations that will improve the standards in commercial breeding establishments across the North. I hope that my officials have assured the Committee that, although council officials have almost 30 years of experience in inspecting dog-breeding establishments, they will work with councils to ensure that their officers understand the requirements and licensing conditions under the new regulations. I endorse that commitment, and I have agreed that the powers in the new regulations will not commence until 1 April to allow time for that to happen.

At the Committee's meeting on 11 December, it indicated that it was content for the regulations to be brought before the Assembly. The Committee provided final clearance of the draft regulations on 5 February. I put on record my thanks to the Committee for its valuable input into all the regulations.

I highlight to Members that, as a result of the new licensing regime, councils will, for the first time, receive a fee that will cover the cost of processing the licence application, including the inspection visit. I assure Members that no unfunded burden will be placed on councils, and hence ratepayers, as result of the regulations.

I appreciate that regulation alone will not stop so-called puppy farming. That is going to take a concerted effort by members of the public, future dog owners, good breeders and enforcement agencies to work together to identify breeders, either licensed or unlicensed, who put financial gain before the welfare needs of their pups and their dogs.

However, these regulations clearly set out the welfare standards with which commercial breeders must comply. More importantly, they provide the powers to allow action to be taken where a breeder does not meet those standards. Council inspectors will also have clear standards for applying strong enforcement powers that will allow them to take action to prosecute anyone who is illegally breeding dogs. In addition, the new enforcement powers and tough penalties will act as a deterrent to those taking part in illegal dog-breeding activities, sending out a clear message that no such activities will be tolerated.

Following Assembly approval of the regulations, my officials will start publicising the existence of the new requirements for commercial breeders and highlighting to future dog owners the importance of buying pups only from reputable breeders and where they can see the conditions in which the pups are born and reared.

So, again, I am grateful to the members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee for their support for the regulations, and I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion, which seeks to affirm the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013. The statutory rule is being laid under powers conferred by sections 12 and 55(3) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

As part of the Committee's scrutiny of proposed legislation, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development presented the outcome of the consultation to the Committee at its meeting on 3 July 2012. After that meeting, many of the key stakeholders expressed considerable concerns about the legislative proposals and the draft guidance for enforcement officers. As a result of those concerns, the Committee agreed to host a stakeholder event to help inform its understanding of the apparent apprehensions felt by a large number of individuals and organisations. This included a wide range and type of organisations, among them animal welfare groups, dog breeders, the local authorities that will enforce the legislation and local hunt clubs. That was an extremely useful exercise, and clarified in the minds of members exactly what the issues were.

The Committee followed up the stakeholder event with a visit to two very different dog-breeding establishments. I take this opportunity to thank both dog breeders who allowed us to visit their premises. That, again, was very useful because we could begin to see what the regulations would actually mean on the ground. The Committee also received oral and written evidence on this issue.

Over the next few months, we worked closely with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officials to clarify and agree positions on a number of issues. That was useful for all concerned, and gradually compromise positions were discussed and agreed. My thanks go to the officials who worked closely with the Committee on this. For example, the Committee expressed reservations on the requirement to spay or neuter dogs at the end of their breeding life before rehoming. Members felt that this would lead to breeders choosing to end the dog's life rather than comply with the requirement, due to the costs involved. It is cheaper to put a dog down than to spay it. On this occasion, after detailed discussions between the Committee and officials, the Minister decided to remove the spaying requirement from the draft regulations.

Members also expressed their concerns regarding the requirement for mandatory record-keeping for each individual dog and their puppies. This was seen to be very bureaucratic and cumbersome by the stakeholders we consulted with. As a result, the Minister agreed to reduce the record-keeping, as she said, to a minimum that a breeding establishment must hold to allow an inspector to assess compliance with the regulations. The Committee sees that as a sensible move in ensuring that the bureaucracy associated with the regulations is not gold-plated but is still effective and proportionate.

A further concern was the proposed requirement to microchip all pups that go out of Northern Ireland to England. Some felt that that would label pups from here as coming from Northern Ireland puppy farms, an image that many breeders would not be happy with — indeed, were horrified by. There were also concerns that microchipping was not a legal requirement in England and might disadvantage locally bred pups. However, in the end, after considerable discussion, the Committee was content that the Minister retain that requirement in the regulations. The Committee is also somewhat reassured to have heard recently that England has since decided to make microchipping compulsory in April 2016. I am sure that that will level the playing field for our dog breeders.

1.00 pm

There are many other examples that I could use of the Committee working well with the departmental officials, but I believe that I have said enough. The statutory rule came before the Committee at SL1 stage on 11 December 2012, and the Committee had no further issues with the merits of the policy. The Committee further considered the statutory rule on 5 February 2013 and resolved that it be affirmed. I confirm that the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is content that the statutory rule be affirmed by the Assembly. I thank the Minister and her officials, who listened closely to the concerns of the Committee and were prepared to take the time and effort to address those concerns.

Mrs Dobson: As Ulster Unionist Party agriculture spokesperson, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the regulations, which have now reached the Floor of the House.

If the vision in the new regulations to increase the welfare standards of dogs and decrease animal cruelty is to be fully realised, it is beholden on the Department to ensure that that vision is properly and efficiently delivered to the benefit of all and not at the expense of legitimate dog breeders and their businesses. Now that the proposals have reached their final stage, the Department, from today, has a duty to educate dog breeders and the wider public. It is vital that everyone knows their roles and responsibilities. There will be many dog breeders, both large and small, including families, who may be unsure how the new regulations will affect them. It is therefore vital that the Department continue to work closely with all stakeholders to increase awareness of the new regulations. I therefore request a clear commitment from the Minister to provide assistance and guidance to dog breeders to make sure that people do not unwittingly get caught on the wrong side of the regulations.

I commend all the stakeholder organisations that engaged fully with the Department and the Committee throughout the process. Through their engagement, they have ensured that the final regulations before the House today are far more realistic than the original unworkable proposals. The regulations allow breeders to focus more on their puppies and less on their paperwork. That is a result of effective lobbying by many groups, and I commend each and every one of them.

I know that, in Committee, members broadly welcomed many of the changes that the Department has made. The issues that dog breeders and their representatives have with the regulations have been discussed at length in Committee, at the Committee stakeholder event, which the Chair mentioned, and when the Chair, the Deputy Chair and I visited dog breeding establishments. The Minister and her officials will be aware that concerns remain among dog breeders regarding the licensing arrangements. I urge them to continue to work with stakeholders to help them and their members.

In passing the regulations, it must be ensured that they will not unwittingly lead to breeders choosing to go underground. I have said at many stages throughout the process that there is a fine line between introducing legislation that is designed to improve the welfare of animals but, through its exercise, leads to more and not fewer puppy farms operating across Northern Ireland. The Department has a moral obligation to ensure that that does not happen. I therefore urge the Minister to monitor the effectiveness of the regulations on an ongoing basis. We welcome the proposals before the House, and I would further welcome the Minister's assurances on the points that I have raised.

Mr Byrne: Like the Members who previously spoke, I welcome the publication of the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations. I thank the Minister for the work that has gone on over the last six months. I also thank the officials for the work that they did in facilitating the Committee.

The Committee held an inquiry and conducted stakeholder consultation meetings, as has been mentioned, including one main one in the Long Gallery. All the interest groups had their say and had an input. As was mentioned previously, the Committee attended two meetings at dog breeding establishments: one small establishment near Aughnacloy and a larger establishment in Fivemiletown. Those meetings were good for the Committee because we saw at first hand some of the issues and concerns that dog-loving people have had about puppy farms in the past.

Puppy farm breeding has been open to question for a number of years. The new regulations will bring some order and conformity to the situation. I am glad to say that the concerns of the smaller greyhound breeding establishments have been addressed by the Minister and the Department. It is important that the smaller greyhound breeders are not badly handicapped by the new regulations.

As the SDLP's agriculture spokesperson and Deputy Chair of the Committee, I fully commend the regulations and thank the Minister and her officials for all their work.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the members of the Committee for all the work that they did in scrutinising the regulations. I assure them that we have time before the regulations come into effect on 1 April to make sure that we publicise the issue wholly and get all the information out to stakeholders and councils. That is a job of work for the period ahead.

I also assure the Member that I listened carefully to the concerns of the greyhound breeders, whom I met throughout the development of the regulations. I am glad that we are going to approve the regulations.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Committee Business

Planning Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

> *That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 7 June 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Planning Bill (NIA Bill 17/11-15).*

On Tuesday 22 January 2013, the Assembly referred the Planning Bill to the Committee for the Environment for scrutiny. The Bill will accelerate the introduction of a number of reforms to the planning system contained in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and will make legislative changes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system.

At its meeting on 24 January, the Committee for the Environment agreed to call for written submissions from interested organisations and individuals. In addition to signposting notices in the local press, stakeholders have been contacted directly, and a number have already indicated their intention to respond to the Committee's request. The Committee for the Environment firmly believes that it is essential that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the Bill, particularly as it includes two new elements that have not been consulted on by the Department. In effect, there is an expectation that the Committee will do the consultation on behalf of the Department. Therefore, we cannot afford to rush the Bill through without proper and full scrutiny. That will take time, so we have allowed until 15 March 2013 for responses.

The Committee anticipates a high volume of submissions. The Committee will invite all respondents to take part in a stakeholder event at which they will have the opportunity to air their views and question the Department and members of the Committee.

The Committee feels that it is essential that it is afforded the time to exercise its scrutiny powers to the full and asks that the House supports this motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Planning Bill to 7 June 2013.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 7 June 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Planning Bill (NIA Bill 17/11-15).

Health Inequalities: Report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose and 15 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly welcomes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of health inequalities; notes the recommendations relating to the restructuring of government Departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the recommendations in the report with the ministerial group on public health and to action those that are within his remit.*

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am delighted to move the motion on behalf of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I would like to begin by providing some background to the Committee's review of health inequalities. The Committee has been concerned about the issue for some time. We are aware that, although the general health of the population has been improving over recent years, the rate of improvement is not equal for everyone. Health outcomes are worst in the most deprived areas in overall terms. There continues to be a large gap across various measures of health, including life expectancy, drug- and alcohol-related deaths, suicide, teenage pregnancy, smoking during pregnancy and cancer-related deaths. The main cause of these health inequalities is poverty.

Back in June 2012, the Committee was aware that the Department was in the process of producing a new public health strategy to follow on from Investing for Health. Members will remember that, when 'Investing for Health' was published by the then Minister, Bairbre de Brún, it was seen as one of the most radical documents of its time. We, therefore, believed that a review of health inequalities would be useful work that could feed into the Department's development of the new strategy.

The Department's draft strategy 'Fit and Well: Changing Lives 2012-2022' was published in August for public consultation. That consultation ran until the end of October 2012, with the strategy expected to be published in spring 2013. Parallel to that process, the Committee carried out its review of health inequalities so that the results of that could feed into the final version of 'Fit and Well'. I want to take the opportunity not only to welcome the Minister to today's debate but to thank him for agreeing to wait until we had finished our report. It is important that the value of the Committee's work is seen by the Department and the Minister because we can add to the process.

The terms of reference of our review were to identify effective interventions to address health inequalities in other regions that could be applied here, with a particular focus on early years intervention. We invited a range of expert witnesses to give evidence to the Committee. We were keen to be outward-looking and see what we could

learn from other places. We heard from people working on projects across Ireland — in Ballymun and the Midlands — from Scotland and the European office of the World Health Organization.

As a Committee, we also agreed to carry out a study visit as part of the review. That involved the Deputy Chair and me going to Cuba to attend an international conference on public health and see for ourselves various aspects of the Cuban healthcare system. The Cuban healthcare system spends $585 on each person a year, whereas we spend almost $4,000. Despite that huge variance, Cuba achieves health outcomes that compare with and, in some cases, exceed those produced by our system. Therefore, we thought that it was important to go to the conference and see at first hand whether there was anything that we could learn about Cuba's system and use here to tackle health inequalities.

One of the striking aspects of the Cuban approach is the focus on primary care. We got the chance to visit a GP surgery and a polyclinic. We learned that, in 1984, Cuba introduced the system of a family doctor and nurse service because they realised that they relied too much on hospital services. Cuba wanted to put a bigger emphasis on prevention and on treating people in the community first and foremost to prevent them needing hospital treatment, where possible. The family doctor lives in the community that they serve. So, at any point in time, they can provide an overview of all his or her patients' general health. As I mentioned in a previous debate, that is partly because they carry out annual health checks, which means that they can prevent ill health or, when needed, intervene early. The Committee fully accepts that some parts of the Cuban health system cannot be directly transferred on to ours. However, the focus on prevention, patient education and primary care all fit in with the vision that the Minister has set out in 'Fit and Well'.

1.15 pm

We visited a polyclinic where various clinics and minor operations were carried out, and we learned that the one that we visited had an infant mortality rate of zero in the past 15 years and had had no maternal deaths in the same period. We also heard that a lot of emphasis is put on the care of pregnant women, who have 12 antenatal appointments. The breastfeeding rate is also very impressive, with 95% of women breastfeeding for up to six months. That means that children get the best possible start in life, because the system prioritises the needs of pregnant women and supports them in breastfeeding. Again, that ties in with the Fit and Well strategy, where the focus is on early intervention. My colleagues from the Committee will speak later about some of our recommendations on breastfeeding and parenting.

Another thing that struck us was that there is a strong focus in Cuba on empowering people to deal with their own condition rather than simply writing them a prescription or giving them a pill. We observed classes and spoke to the instructors. The classes were held in a hall that had been pretty damaged by the recent weather in Cuba. However, it was decided that the hall could still be used, and work was still going on. The classes were held in that public hall, which had basic facilities. Throughout the day, different classes were held for people with health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis and depression. Those people had been referred to the classes by their doctor. So, instead of automatically being given a prescription or a pill, they were referred to a class. All the classes were free of charge, and the instructor was employed by the state. There was no modern gym equipment, but there was a can-do attitude from both the instructor and the participants, who made best use of the buildings and facilities that were available to them.

We also talked to men and women who participated in daily grandparent circles, and we attended one such circle. The circles involve people aged from their 50s to their 80s meeting every morning in a public park to do a set of exercises together. We met a woman who was over 80 and still had her own teeth. She had lost only one tooth, which is impressive for somebody of that age. The members of the group were enthusiastic about the benefits of exercise. Importantly, however, they were also enthusiastic about the social aspect of such groups, which is often forgotten. Sometimes, we talk about our elderly being excluded and isolated, but I thought that the social aspect of that group was hugely important.

The group is peer-led, but an instructor visits twice a week to ensure that people do the correct exercises. A doctor also visits every couple of weeks to monitor blood pressure and so on. Again, they were using a public park. There were no special facilities, and it was free to everyone. If we are serious about tackling health inequalities, we need to make better use of our assets. We have so many leisure centres, parks, schools, school playing fields, halls, church halls and government buildings that could all be opened up a lot more widely so that people could take part in activities that would benefit their health. In fact, in Cuba, there was even a project for children with learning disabilities that was based in the local zoo. The staff were using the animals in the zoo and factoring them in to the weekly work programme for the children, which involved therapy and exercise. We need to think outside the box.

The report says that, if we are to get a handle on health inequalities, there must be a united front across all Departments. It is not an issue for the Department of Health alone; in fact, the Department cannot deal with the issue on its own. As part of the review, I wrote to all Departments on behalf of the Committee asking for details about the programmes that they currently run to tackle health inequalities through early years intervention. Unfortunately, a number of Departments simply stated that they had no such programmes. It is my impression that some Departments have not quite grasped the fact that we all have a role to play in improving the health of our people. It goes across the board: we need to look at education, housing, job creation, access to the arts and sport and so on. It is important that all Departments accept that they have their part to play.

The Minister is keen to secure cross-departmental buy-in and action for the Fit and Well strategy. I assure the Minister today that the Committee is more than willing to be part of the push to tackle health inequalities. I urge members of other Committees to take the time to ask what their Department does to promote public health. If Departments are not doing anything, they need to do something. If Departments are doing stuff, can they do more?

I thank Committee members for the part that they played in the report and staff from the Committee and the Research

and Information Service, who helped us to produce the report. I also thank the witnesses who gave the Committee the benefit of their knowledge of and information about the programmes that they run. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Ms Brown: I speak as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to commend the report to the House.

On taking office in May 2011, the Minister of Health, Edwin Poots, placed health inequality at the heart of the agenda. It is not fair or equal that we have a society in which inequalities not only are evident but continue to widen. It is therefore imperative that the Assembly acts to reduce inequalities and strive to build a fairer society for all.

At the heart of health inequalities, we see more people and communities suffering from smoking- and heart-related diseases, suicide, teenage pregnancies, drug- and alcohol-related mortality and cancer mortality compared with other areas of Northern Ireland. People are not necessarily born with poor health; rather, it is often a condition of their environment, and that condition is poverty.

In my constituency of South Antrim, nearly 18% of the population have a long-term health problem that affects their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Some 38% of the population hold either no qualification whatsoever or a low qualification. Members may ask why I raise the issue of health alongside that of low educational attainment. The answer is simple: as the report demonstrates, they are linked.

There is a need for a joined-up approach to tackle health inequality as well as poverty. The issue needs to be taken up by the Executive Committee as a whole, from the perspective of the economy, regional development, agriculture, rural development and education. Every Department has some role to play.

The Department of Health provides services for those who need them. The practice of modern medicine has come a long way in recent years, but it is poverty that remains at the heart of poor health. That poverty is partly caused by the absence of a nurturing environment to provide a decent education for our young people, which helps to secure employment in an ever more competitive work environment. A historical absence of decent housing also contributes, as does the need for supportive and better rural life with access to schools, a library and an employment centre, access for infants to local, supportive preschool nurseries and access for parents to programmes such as Sure Start that provide an early intervention mechanism. There is obviously a role for parents and local communities, but many of those involved in such communities have been calling for much of this for some time amid cuts and closures. I urge all Departments to review those strategies, which are clearly not delivering, with a view to overhauling them to ensure that they deliver for all our communities.

The bones of the report focus on the need for a joined-up approach among Departments towards promoting better health and reducing health inequalities; namely, collaborating and prioritising funding and resources for projects in areas of social and economic disadvantage. One of the report's recommendations is that consideration should be given to creating a Department for children and young people to place greater focus on early years intervention, and I ask the Minister to comment on that recommendation and to update us on how that complements the work of the ministerial subgroup on children and young people. While there is much for the Minister of Health to consider in this report, there is much for others to digest to see what could lead to a better, healthier and more equal Northern Ireland.

Mr Beggs: I, too, am pleased to support the motion highlighting the Committee's review of health inequalities.

When we reviewed the Statistics and Research Agency's figures, it was clear that there were huge variations in life expectancy. The average female life expectancy in Northern Ireland is 80·5 years, but, in the 20% most deprived areas, it moves down to 77·9 years. For a male from one of the 20% most deprived areas, it is 71·5 years. Those are quite dramatic variations in life expectancy, and, with that, there is associated illness. A range of factors are thought to contribute to that, such as an increased risk of mortality because of drugs, alcohol and smoking and an increased risk of suicide. There is also the issue of respiratory mortality and cancer mortality.

The Committee received evidence from a range of experts, many of whom pointed towards the importance of early years programmes to help improve the health of the next generation and to reduce health inequalities. Mention was made of Professor James Heckman and Sir Harry Burns, who have both recognised the importance of early years investment in education and in health. I declare an interest as a member of Horizon Sure Start, which provides support to parents in Carrickfergus and Larne.

I will concentrate on recommendation 4 in the Committee's report, which states:

> *"The new public health strategy should recognize parenting as having a significant influence over long-term public health issues and should adopt a 'progressive universalism' approach to supporting parenting projects."*

In the evidence from the Triple P Project, we were advised of how Kaiser Permanente, an American insurance company, had reviewed the effects of adverse childhood experiences. It highlighted that such adverse experiences result in a higher risk of developing obesity, ischaemic heart disease, depression and alcoholism. So, by improving parenting skills and reducing adverse experiences, the health of the next generation can be improved. Progressive universalism is about supporting everyone, with more support for those who need it most. The Triple P project from Longford and Westmeath highlighted that 30% of children with social and emotional behavioural problems had parents from lower socio-economic groups. Of course, that means that 70% were from other groups, and there clearly needs to be support across the board for everyone. The group also highlighted the research by Steve Aos from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, which, again, expressed a preference for the universal approach and indicated that, essentially, you get better results and better value from your investment by taking that approach. Some parents may require only limited support and guidance from literature, whereas others will benefit from extra parenting support such as classes and regular meetings with advisers and specialists.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of how a parent can affect the health of their child is demonstrated by the issue of mothers who smoke. According to the NHS website on smoking and the unborn baby, protecting your baby from tobacco smoke is one of the best things that you can do to give your child a healthy start in life. Every cigarette you smoke in pregnancy harms your unborn baby. It contributes to an increased risk of stillbirth, and newborn children are less likely to be able to cope with any complications that arise. Smokers' babies are more likely to be born early and to face the additional breathing, feeding and health problems that go with being premature. A child of someone who smokes is more likely to be underweight and less able to fight off infection.

There is also an increased risk of cot deaths. What is quite surprising is the variation in the numbers of mothers who still smoke in Northern Ireland. When I looked at the official figures, I discovered that, in the Old Warren ward, 55% of mothers still smoked in 2011. In the Greystone ward, 50% smoked, and 48% in the Ballee ward. In my constituency, 41% of mothers in the Clipperstown ward smoked, and 39% of mothers in Sunnylands and Blackcave still smoked.

1.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Beggs: Clearly, further early education support is needed to try to identify this problem and prevent children from suffering.

Mr McCarthy: I offer my support and that of the Alliance Party to the recommendations that are contained in this report. Inequalities in any aspect of modern life are wrong, unacceptable and should not happen, but, when it comes to inequalities in health provision, it is time that someone stood up and called a halt to what is going on. That is exactly what we in the Health Committee have done in this review, and I pay tribute to our Chairperson for putting this very important issue on the agenda and carrying out such a review of the issue. Hopefully, as a result of our investigation, we can, together, put forward those inequalities and what we see as a means to put an end to all health inequalities in Northern Ireland.

I also commend the Committee staff for their work, particularly in bringing to our sessions very important people from various backgrounds who gave us an insight into their experience and made suggestions on a way forward. I also welcome the presence today of the Health Minister, and I hope that, together, we can see an end to health inequalities for all in our society.

So far, colleagues from the Health Committee have spoken on a variety of issues, and I wish to deal with the contribution that was made by Dr Erio Ziglio, the European officer with the World Health Organization, and Joan Devlin from Belfast Healthy Cities. We were extremely grateful to have the input from such a very high-profile individual. He took time out to contribute to our review, along with our own Joan Devlin from Belfast Healthy Cities, who continues to do extremely valuable work in Belfast.

One of the key points that was made by Dr Ziglio was that a reduction in health inequalities could not be made by working solely within the health service. He argued that, for a public health strategy to be successful, it must provide added value to local and regional development. In his experience, countries with an overall development strategy will have more success, and that is exactly what we want to see as a result.

Dr Ziglio told us how Slovenia had major health inequalities and poor indicators on health and unemployment. However, over a 10-year period, Slovenia made significant improvements by identifying and bringing together three main sectors — health, agriculture and tourism — and produced a strategy that involved all three Departments of government. By working together collectively, there were benefits for each of the sectors, and Dr Ziglio made the point that this combined approach is better than each of the Departments working as silos and seeing each other's Departments as competitors for limited resources. We see some of that quite regularly in Northern Ireland. He also suggested that we in Northern Ireland should look more closely at how to maximise European structural funding opportunities. He believed that the trend has been for most of the funding in health to go to buildings, which might not necessarily be the best way forward. If health could join with other sectors, that would be a better way to access European funding.

With these wise words from this eminent World Health Organization doctor, our Committee has made its first recommendation, which states that the Health Department should actively work to form partnerships with other areas of government, such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), which includes tourism, the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and, indeed, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The Health Department should form partnerships to access much-needed European structural funds.

As I said earlier, health inequalities are unacceptable, and it would be everyone's goal to see them eliminated as soon as possible. If our recommendations are acted upon, we could indeed see —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McCarthy: — equity in all our health provisions. I hope that the Minister will act on those recommendations.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also speak as a member of the Health Committee and in support of the motion. I, too, acknowledge the role of the Committee and its staff in undertaking such an important report.

Tackling health inequalities must be central to the delivery of health and social care provision and the Transforming Your Care proposals. Early intervention and prevention is central to that objective. We spend £4·6 billion per year on health and social care and employ 70,000 staff, but the reality is that health has not been shared equally across all the people in our society. The life expectancy of someone in a more affluent area is around 10 years greater than that of someone in a more deprived area. With respect to health inequalities, the top three constituencies are Belfast West, Belfast North and Foyle.

In that context, therefore, I want to focus on recommendation 9 of the Committee's report, which is:

> *"The Department should consider increasing the percentage of the overall health and social care budget spend on prevention to 6% within the next decade."*

That issue was discussed at an evidence session with the World Health Organization, where it was indicated that

most European countries' average spend on prevention is 3%, and that that should double within the next decade. The World Health Organization highlighted how there is still reluctance by some Governments to direct resources to prevention.

What, therefore, do we mean by prevention? The Social Care Institute for Excellence defines prevention as providing a range of services that promote independence, prevent or delay the deterioration of well-being resulting from ageing, illness or disability, and delay the need for more costly and intensive services.

The Economic and Social Research Institute of Ireland stated that, for every €1 invested, you get €7 in return. I stress that those figures are for the Twenty-six Counties only, and I urge the Minister to work with his counterparts in Dublin to provide all-Ireland figures that provide us with a clear economic case for early intervention and prevention.

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland referred to the need for preferential resourcing to disadvantaged communities. The World Health Organization described how the resources could be mobilised, through partnership with other sectors, or through utilising resources that come from the EU through structural or cohesion funds. Early intervention in Scotland resulted in savings of £5·4 million to the Scottish economy.

I want, therefore, to examine a number of key health areas that could be impacted on by prevention. In the Western Trust area, the largest inequality gaps are in alcohol-related mortality, 112%; self-harm admissions, 89%; teenage births, 76%; and smoking during pregnancy, 71%. The constituencies of Belfast West, Belfast North and Foyle have the highest standardised death rates of the main causes of death. The four constituencies of Belfast West, Belfast North, East Derry, and Foyle had over one third of all teenage births in 2010. One hundred and eighty seven alcohol-related deaths occurred in Foyle between 2001 and 2010. All those are stark inequalities that require additional focus and investment in prevention and early intervention.

The principle of Transforming Your Care, in shifting resources from acute to community services, is laudable, but with that comes additional demand for resources. We have an ageing population and, although opting to be cared for at home is an understandable request, it requires additional support for families and carers. Prevention schemes for older people in England that are delivered through the WRVS organisation examined the social return on investment. The hospital-based aspect of the study showed a £1·9 million return on investment.

In conclusion, I highlight two important proposals in advancing early intervention and prevention. The first is the development of the social care campus model, which will allow for a combination of health and community care to be delivered as part of a hub. Secondly, I suggest to the Minister, in his absence, that the facilities exist in the north-west through the Project Kelvin database and its link to North America, the C-TRIC facility and the university, in terms of connected health. I ask the Minister to comment and update us on both those proposals.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. It is a very important matter for everyone across Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, health inequalities continue to exist in today's society, and that remains the challenge that we all must continue to work to improve. I commend the Health Minister for all his work to date on leading on this and trying to improve the health and well-being of our population. I know that he will continue to make preventative care and health promotion a top priority in the Health Department.

The Health Committee has undertaken a lot of work on this subject, and its review of health inequalities has provided some valuable findings that will be useful to the Department as it plans for the future. Life expectancy, alcohol and drug-related deaths, levels of self-harm, teenage births, suicide rates, and respiratory and lung cancer rates were found to be among the most sizeable inequality gaps between deprived areas and the overall figure across the Province. Even in a constituency such as mine — North Down has one of the highest rates of life expectancy — real divisions exist and, therefore, health inequalities unfortunately exist between people who may live only one mile apart. Every constituency experiences significant health inequalities in its population.

As has been said, the Committee has taken evidence from Dr Erio Ziglio, from the World Health Organization. He spoke of how different Government departments in Slovenia, such as health, tourism and agriculture, work together to get positive outcomes for health inequalities. He also spoke about Scotland, where a thematic approach was taken to Departments to tackle inequalities. Some of the recommendations of that review are particularly realistic and constructive. Early intervention was importantly distinguished as one of the best ways to address health inequalities, and that also came through during the many evidence sessions we held with groups and organisations.

The role of parenting was established as one of the keys to improving heath inequalities. It is vital that the correct emphasis is put on supporting parents. Some of the evidence gathered from the Republic of Ireland highlighted the fact that a lack of support for parenting can often have negative effects on children as they grow up. Broken homes and marriage breakdown can also add to health inequalities, and I believe that we should do more to support marriage as a basis for stable homes and society.

Another recommendation is that we should identify and fully utilise the significant resources that we have already. There is a vital role for a cross section of statutory and voluntary agencies to work together and pool resources to help tackle health inequalities. Working together on the ground in our communities is important, as is working together at Executive level. I know that the Minister has been personally involved in several community outreach projects, including those in Kilcooley in Bangor in the North Down constituency, working alongside the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Departments must work together in a joined up way to tackle these important issues. Education and Health should be working hand in hand on many of the issues around early intervention. However, every Department has a role to play. The promotion of healthier living and well-being should also be continually prioritised by the Department. I know that much good work has already been done on that over the past number of years. Prevention is better than cure, and that must remain our top focus and priority as we plan for the future and ensure

that we have a fit-for-purpose health service that will tackle the health inequalities that exist in Northern Ireland today.

1.45 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, speak as a member of the Health Committee in support of the motion.

The Public Health Agency highlights the fact that poverty and economic inequality are bad for health, with poverty an important risk factor in illness and premature death. Poverty affects health directly and indirectly in many ways, including financial strain, poor housing, poor living environments, poor diet and limited access to employment and other resources, services and opportunities. Poor health can also cause poverty. It is well established that the poorest people live the shortest lives in the worst health. Unfortunately, we have persistent poverty here in the North. The figure stands at 21% before housing costs, which is more than double the 9% in Great Britain.

The research on health inequalities makes interesting reading. My constituency, for instance, ranks eighth for multiple deprivation. A number of other health inequality rankings indicate that my constituency of Newry and Armagh is not particularly well off.

I will concentrate on recommendation eight of the report, which is that the new public health strategy should prioritise funding for projects that involve collaboration between partner organisations to ensure a co-ordinated and more effective approach to particular issues.

Another recommendation is that the Department place the new public health strategy in the context of a wider governmental strategy for the development of the North as a region. The Department should work to form partnerships with other areas of government, including Departments not traditionally associated with health matters, such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, DRD and DARD. The Department should also look at other sectors where partnerships could be formed, leading to the accessing of European structural funds. It has been argued that a reduction in health inequalities cannot be achieved by working solely in the health sector. For a public health strategy to be successful, it must also provide added value to local and regional development.

Slovenia was mentioned by other Members. I also cite it as an example of where there were major problems and poor health and unemployment indicators. Over a 10-year period, Slovenia made significant improvements in reducing health inequalities and unemployment. It did so through partnership with three sectors. It identified these three sectors — health, agriculture and tourism — and produced a strategic plan involving them. The trend here has been for most health funding to go into buildings. If health can partner other sectors, there will be more of an opportunity to access funds.

The importance of collaboration between sectors, communities or organisations delivering services on the ground cannot be overemphasised. There will be a major role for voluntary organisations in the concept of Transforming Your Care, and a collaborative approach will continue to be very important. If it is accepted that a partnership approach is required for a project to be funded, that will avoid duplication and succeed in bringing together a wide range of skills and expertise, which can only enhance and promote any public health strategy. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr McDevitt: I, too, speak as a member of the Health Committee. I am very happy to support the motion and speak to the report.

Colleagues have covered several important areas where health inequality manifests itself. I want to focus on one area that I might not be expected to focus on. Nonetheless, I shall, and the issue is breastfeeding.

It is a simple reality that the breastfeeding rates in our region are unbelievably low. They do not stack up well in comparison with other parts of the world. Indeed, they stack up unfavourably compared with other parts of these islands. Yet the benefits of early breastfeeding and sustained breastfeeding during the first six months of a child's life are beyond doubt. Today, a very interesting news report points to the specific benefit of colostrum, which is the very early milk that a mother produces during the first day or two of a child's life, and how essential it is to building up the child's immune capacity and developing essential reflexes, such as the swallow reflex.

I am very happy to speak on this topic because I am the husband of a woman who took the positive decision to breastfeed her three children. One of the reasons why I was late for the debate is that those three children are now enjoying the benefits of the canteen downstairs. The sad reality is that our socio-economic background means that we are probably in the group of people that is able to make that choice. Mrs McKevitt is here beside me and has, I am afraid to say, been accused of being my wife on a couple of occasions — something that I know she deals with well. She told me that she took the positive decision to breastfeed her five children. Again, I suspect that she was able to make that decision because she was coming from a socio-economic grouping and educational basis that gave her the opportunity to make it.

The report highlights the inequality that exists between women who come from some of the most deprived wards and those who come from the least deprived. The inequality is, of course, that the more less well off you are the less likely you will be able to make a positive choice to breastfeed for your children.

To give you some statistics, it is worth noting that only 15% of children here are breastfed up to the age of six months. I think that the Committee Chair pointed out that, in Cuba, that figure is 95%. Mrs McKevitt, speaking privately during the debate, reflected to me that it is unlikely that a breast is best campaign was running in Cuba and that that is just the way it is. It is cultural and accepted. Women do not feel awkward or strange if they decide to breastfeed, and doing so is not seen as something that should cause the slightest embarrassment or as anything other than perfectly ordinary.

The Health Committee's report highlights that, in several jurisdictions, not least in Scotland, there is a debate on, and, indeed, a law on the statute book, protecting the right of women to breastfeed in public places. It seems sad that any jurisdiction should have to think about giving a woman the right to do what, frankly, in many ways seems like the most natural and obvious thing for her. However, if that is necessary, so be it. It is a shame and a sad indictment on a society. I wish that we would not have to think about going down that road. However, we may have

to, because the sad reality is that we know of incidents of discrimination against women in Northern Ireland who sought to breastfeed outside the privacy of their homes.

The debate about breastfeeding is a debate about culture, tolerance, understanding and respect. It is a debate about women and about having the integrity, courage and maturity to understand —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: Yes, of course.

Mr Wells: The Member is developing an interesting point, and I want to see it through to a conclusion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to have an extra bit of time.

I think that it is important for us all to understand that some of the ways in which we objectify women and choose to present them in our society make it more difficult for debates such as this to happen. Some of the ways in which we have sought to marginalise breastfeeding and treat it as something that should be done in private rather than just as part of a child's early development have set us back a little.

I hope that this report is yet another opportunity to raise the issue. I look forward to the Minister's response. I hope — indeed, I trust — that he will have a progressive perspective on the issue. I, for one, would love to be able to give every single child in our little region the opportunity to benefit from the great start that my kids and Mrs McKevitt's kids had.

Mr Easton: Health inequalities are major factors in determining life outcomes for people in our society. Although the overall trend is improving health and better outcomes, there still exists a wide spectrum of health outcomes across various measurements. I believe that we must look to new and innovative ways to tackle those differences and to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to increase the positive outcomes for their health.

Poverty is one of the major issues that affects a person's health. People often tell us — indeed, they tell me — that basics such as food are priced so that the food that is best for our health is often out of the price range of those who are on the lowest incomes. Recent events have shown the dangers of accessing cheap food. Again, one of the biggest groups affected will be those on a low income. That highlights why the first recommendation in the report is so vital.

Through cross-departmental working, we can address issues such as poverty and deprivation, which will then have a real and positive effect on people's health outcomes. For instance, the Department for Social Development's work on encouraging people to ensure that they are receiving their full welfare benefit entitlement means that people will have more money to spend on food. The warm homes scheme ensures that people's homes are effectively insulated. That benefits the environment and means that heating costs will come down, leaving more income that can be spent on good-quality food. It is important to seek out further ways in which partnerships with other Departments and outside agencies can be established to increase the positive health outcomes that we all want to see.

There is a plethora of evidence to show that, to achieve value for money, the best place in which to invest is early years. Prenatal care, breastfeeding and support for parents are themes that continually arose during the research for the report. Although no one is suggesting that we should write off programmes that aim to help our youth or adults make good choices, if we get early intervention correct, we will see better health outcomes. Breastfeeding, for example, provides protection not just for the baby but for the mother. It is considerably cheaper than formula feeding and has beneficial bonding qualities for the family. However, Northern Ireland has the poorest rate of breastfeeding beyond six months when compared with other countries. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding for at least the first year of a baby's life. We must therefore support mothers who wish to breastfeed by introducing legislation to support breastfeeding mothers.

A child who resides in a house in which there are addiction issues, violence or neglect is not going to reach its full potential in any aspect of life. The introduction in 2012 of the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland has provided scope to examine parenting choices and how they impact on children in the family. Children with behavioural problems come not just from the lower socio-economic group but from a wide range of families with a wide range of experiences. Universal access to programmes is therefore fundamental to help address the issues and health outcomes for that child and the family. A child with behavioural problems has a significant impact on the whole family. Therefore, the whole family must be treated as a unit, not just the child.

While promoting universal inclusion, we must ensure that resources home in on those groups that are traditionally hard to reach. We must increase funding to projects that involve collaboration between partner organisations. We must identify best practice models that exist and work to enhance their impact. The role of the third sector in that is vital. The success of, for example, Sure Start is evidence of good practice in partnership-working. The voluntary sector can often access hard-to-reach groups as well as be on the ground. It can tell us what is needed in a particular area and what will work in that area.

Prevention is better than cure, and it often comes at a much lower economic cost. In these economic times, it is all about value for money. Increasing the amount that we spend on prevention rather than cure will achieve better health outcomes for all communities. By educating our young people and families on good health choices, by collaborative working and by supporting families, we can make a difference to the health outcomes of the whole of Northern Ireland in years to come.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the Committee's report on health inequalities, particularly the focus on early years interventions. It signals a recognition that, although our health has been improving in general, the rate of improvement has not been the same for everyone. I have already agreed with the Health Committee to delay the publication of the strategic framework for public health until I have had time to consider the recommendations and to discuss them, as necessary, with colleagues.

When I made a statement to the Assembly in September on the publication for consultation of the draft framework,

I drew Members' attention to the fact that health outcomes are generally worst in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland when compared with the region generally. A number of Members across the House identified that today. Those inequalities are, of course, not unique to Northern Ireland. However, we can learn from experience elsewhere.

The new public health framework is intended to build on the work already undertaken under the 2002 Investing for Health strategy and set the direction for the next 10 years.

2.00 pm

I think that we would all agree that changes in population health are a long-term goal, which can take decades to achieve. A review of Investing for Health, which was carried out in 2010, acknowledged a considerable amount of evidence to support the rationale for tackling the societal influences that impact on health, such as education and literacy; employment and working conditions; housing; and income. Increased emphasis on the societal factors complement the more traditional focus on disease prevention and associated factors, such as diet, alcohol and tobacco use.

The review also drew attention to the evidence that investment in early childhood interventions can reduce the societal inequalities rooted in poverty, by providing young children from disadvantaged backgrounds with a more equitable start in life. Early interventions have the potential to reap long-term benefits, as they can influence health and other outcomes over the whole-of-life course.

The new framework, on which consultation was completed towards the end of last year, addresses many aspects highlighted in the Committee's recommendations and is generally in accord with its findings.

I turn, first, to the Committee's call for a new public health strategy to be placed in the context of wider government strategy and for a thematic approach across the public sector. Those are principles that underpin the new public health framework. The new framework will contribute towards the achievement of a number of objectives in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy. It will also seek to create synergy with other key government strategies, such as Delivering Social Change.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

I agree that strategic alliances need to be formed in tackling many of the public health issues that we face. You have heard me say before that I want every Minister to be a Minister for health. The public health framework is the result of working across all parts of government. It sets out a cross-cutting programme of action. The ministerial group on public health, which I chair, has led on and will continue to contribute to its development. I have also held bilateral meetings with ministerial colleagues on key public health issues, such as suicide prevention.

There are other initiatives to which I need to draw people's attention. We are working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), for example. Those colleagues are doing significant work. Other Departments, which might not have been traditionally associated with health matters, such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department for Regional Development, are working with us as well. There are courses of work on public health happening within government, and that is something that I strongly welcome.

The draft public health strategic framework also recognised the potential for greater collaboration across government and proposed six priority areas for consideration. One illustration relates to the use of space and assets. Across the public sector, we have many physical assets that could be put to better use through co-operation. For example, local communities could benefit from school premises and facilities, such as playing fields, outside of hours. Many public spaces could be used more widely to promote physical activity, and we need to take creative approaches.

The process of establishing a thematic approach to Departments, as in Scotland, for example, where Cabinet Ministers have responsibility for broad areas, such as health, finance, employment and sustainable growth, is an interesting one. Although it is not within my sole gift, I would be happy to further consider options with ministerial colleagues for the benefit of population health.

In respect of the recommendation to create a Department for children and young people, I am fully supportive of co-ordinating responsibility for children's issues. However, my view is that the clear direction of travel should be towards fewer, not more, Departments. I am fully committed to ensuring that early years intervention remains a key focus for this Department, and I will continue to work with other Departments on that and on other areas of common interest.

To illustrate that, my Department is actively engaging with other Departments on a number of early intervention initiatives. For example, discussions are under way with Departments that have a key interest in children and young people about the establishment of an interdepartmental early intervention fund. We also received £5 million through OFMDFM's Delivering Social Change framework to deliver increased direct family support and support for parents' projects, both of which have strong early intervention elements.

My Department's regional family and parenting strategy, Families Matter, and the draft public health framework place emphasis on the importance of early intervention and parenting support. The public health framework proposes early years as one of the two strategic priorities in tackling inequalities. We chose early years because of the now overwhelming evidence internationally that people's life chances are most heavily influenced by their development in the first years of life. That was highlighted by several of those who gave evidence to the Committee.

I agree that if we are to break the cycle of disadvantage across generations, it is vital that our children are given the best possible start in life. That starts from antenatal care, and includes childhood development, support for good parenting and opportunities for learning. What happens to children in their earliest years is key to their outcomes in adult life, not in relation just to health, but to educational attainment and economic status.

A number of Members mentioned breastfeeding. The issue is not just the nutritious value of the mother's milk, but the nurturing and important bonding that takes place, which

makes children into better adults who can relate more easily to others in how they deal with other people in later life.

The Committee also made recommendations on early years and the importance of parenting to reinforce that priority in our strategy. Another of the framework's proposed priority areas for collaboration across Departments is support for families and children:

> *"enhance support through incremental development of targeted and universal programmes."*

Again, that is in line with the Committee's recommendations on early years and a progressive universalism approach to support for parenting.

I believe firmly that by adopting early intervention approaches to policy development and service delivery, we can deliver improved outcomes for children, young people and families. I also recognise that intervening early in the lives of children and families has the potential to deliver economic gains, as has been evidenced elsewhere, including in Scotland.

In addition, as sponsor Department for the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), I agree with the Committee's assessment that whilst the SBNI's main focus is to ensure the effectiveness of agencies involved in child protection, it does have wider powers to promote the safeguarding of children more generally.

I also commend the creation of supportive environments for breastfeeding, as is outlined in the report. It is one of those three proposed strategic outcomes. The introduction of legislation to support breastfeeding mothers is one of the proposed measures to achieve that outcome.

I have already referred to the aspiration in the public health framework for better collaborative working to make best use of all of the resources that we have. I welcome the Committee's recommendation on that.

One of our greatest assets is the people of Northern Ireland. We need to harness the commitment and energy of individuals and local communities in addressing the health issues that matter to them in ways that work for them. Health professionals need to be skilled up to support people to do things for themselves.

With regard to the new public health framework's prioritizing funding projects which involve collaboration between partner organisations, the framework will recognise that partnership working on a broad cross-sectoral basis continues to be vital if we are to make substantive progress in reducing inequalities. The framework should be used to help inform investment in programmes and interventions which are shown to be effective. In light of current financial constraints, it is essential that opportunities are taken to maximise existing resources and effect across all partner organisations.

The Public Health Agency will have a key role in working with others across government and other sectors to co-ordinate delivery and bring about more effective collaboration.

With regard to the recommendation to increase spend on public health, I remain committed to increasing the share of the health budget which is devoted to public health. I have already allocated additional funds to the Public Health Agency in 2012-13, which has enabled new investment in the provision of additional support services to help to address suicide and mental health issues; new initiatives to support vulnerable young children and their families; development of new programmes to help older people to continue to live independently; new breast screening services; and new initiatives to help to tackle obesity. Any commitment in that area, however, must be considered alongside the range of other priorities for the health budget, including meeting the needs of an ageing population and addressing the ever-increasing complexity of healthcare requirements.

I believe that there is much common good between my Department's strategic proposals for public health and the Committee's recommendations. The recommendations are also in keeping with the shift left agenda called for by Transforming Your Care.

Those are some initial comments on the report. I have undertaken to consider the recommendations more fully, together with the outcomes of our consultation, during the process of developing the final public health framework. I should add that we had a substantial number of responses to the consultation. We received over 140 responses, most of which are detailed and well argued, and deserve careful consideration.

The process will include two cross-sectoral workshops, to which representatives of the current ministerial group on public health have been invited, along with other key stakeholders. The first workshop took place a week ago, and the Committee's recommendations were shared with the group that day. A further workshop is planned for next month, and the aim is to finalise the framework this spring.

The process of finalising the public health framework will seek to identify further opportunities for cross–departmental working, which I will be happy to discuss with Executive colleagues as necessary. It is in the interests of all of us collectively as elected representatives to ensure that all people are enabled and supported in achieving their full health potential and well-being, which is the proposed view of the new public health framework.

Collaboration across government and at all levels of society will be vital if we are to change lives, particularly for our young people. Leadership from all Ministers will be of paramount importance. I welcome the Committee's support in this vital area of work. I am happy to work further with the Committee on the issue as we seek to achieve the common goals of improving the health of the Northern Ireland population and reducing health inequalities.

Mr Wells (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): In one sense, this is an unusual debate in that we know what the problem is and we know where we need to get to. Maybe the difficulty is in getting from A to B.

As Maeve McLaughlin quite rightly said, health outcomes in Northern Ireland are largely determined by where you were born. As she indicated, in constituencies such as Foyle, North Belfast and West Belfast, health outcomes, by every measurement, are poor in respect of length of life, health during that life and the health of our children. Unfortunately, it is often the case that where you were born determines how good or bad those outcomes will be.

All the indicators certainly suggest that health risks such as smoking, alcohol abuse, drugs, obesity and lack of breastfeeding are self-evidently a problem in the poorest parts of our society.

Mr Beggs brought to the table some very useful information on the issue.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Smoking in the home increases the risk of a child suffering from asthma. Is the Member aware that a combination of early years health education from Sure Start, home visits from health visitors and the provision of smoking cessation support from local pharmacists, etc, has significantly reduced smoking rates in certain areas such as the Antiville and Love Lane wards in my constituency, where it has gone down from 60% to 22% and 50% to 22% respectively within a two-year period? Is he aware that such dramatic changes can occur?

Mr Wells: I was not, but I certainly think that that is a very useful addition to the debate, showing the form of intervention that can provide a quick hit in helping to reduce health inequalities.

Mr Beggs also revealed some startling statistics from other parts of Northern Ireland. For instance, he said that, in Old Warren, which I believe is in the Minister's constituency, 55% of expectant mothers are smokers. It is extremely worrying that that is going on because of the inevitable outcomes for health inequalities. I am sure that, if you compared it with a similar sized population in somewhere like BT9 or Cherryvalley in Belfast, you would see a very different pattern of smoking. There is a very famous picture —

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. Interestingly enough, we did a course of work, through the Public Health Agency and Barnardo's, in a number of estates in the Lisburn area that have challenging problems, and that was obviously one of the things that was highlighted. However, it also highlighted a range of problems that then led to poor educational outcomes. Poor educational outcomes and poor health outcomes go hand in hand. Therefore, working together to ensure that we drive up both simultaneously is absolutely critical.

2.15 pm

Mr Wells: I agree entirely with the Minister. Indeed, in the most recent Chief Medical Officer's annual report, there was a very graphic indication: if you take a bus from the Markets area, which, I assume, is South Belfast, to the top of the Malone Road, your life expectancy, if you are male, increases by nine years. That is nothing to do with the fact that the air is fresher at the top of the Malone Road; it is all to do with poverty and the outcomes of having very little in the way of the world's resources.

The Committee was very fortunate to hear from expert witnesses with a wide range of experiences. The Ballymun project in Dublin, which I do not think has been mentioned yet, was very interesting. Ballymun is one of those huge 1960s or early 1970s estates that has enormous problems because of unemployment, disabilities and poverty. We heard about what was being done to tackle the health outcomes of the 20,000 people who live in that estate. The Longford/Westmeath Triple P project was also fascinating because you had a mixture of urban and rural. Dr Ziglio gave us evidence from Slovenia. In addition, some of us had the benefit of attending a seminar on the situation in Glasgow.

All the evidence indicates what needs to be done. First, we need a greater emphasis on public health. The Public Health Agency has recently been established in Northern Ireland. We were very critical of Mr McGimpsey as Minister throughout his time, but one of the things that was positive during his time as Health Minister was the formation of the Public Health Agency. All the evidence indicates that we need to increase our expenditure on the public health element of health to 6% — it is a much higher level in Cuba — so we have to double our expenditure over the foreseeable future.

Secondly, we need collaboration among Departments. You cannot tackle this with the silo mentality that we and many other parts of the United Kingdom have. Of course, perhaps the most interesting and controversial recommendation of the report is that we should move towards the formation of a children and young people's Department. The Minister said in response that he disagreed with the creation of more Departments. The Committee envisages that replacing a current Department rather than bringing about a new one. Scotland does not have silos; it has Ministers based round themes such as older people and children and young people. That works, because a themed ministership brings together all the resources required to tackle a specific issue. You do not have to barter among 12 different Departments to bring elements to the table to create a mixture of policies to bring about better outcomes for young people; you would have a Department with the primary aim of delivering that outcome.

I accept that, under the present structures that we have in Northern Ireland — the need to have everyone round the table in a five-party mandatory coalition — it is difficult to think outside the box and have themed Ministers. However, I would like to think that, as we become a more normal democratic society, we will start to think in that way. I cannot see, because of the very wide encompassing nature of public health in Northern Ireland, how we can deliver what we need, particularly for our young people, simply on the basis of the present structures. I accept that that is an argument for another day. It is certainly not one that the Minister, without waving a magic wand, could deliver in the morning. I hope that, as things move on, we will be able to move to that holy grail.

Mr Beggs mentioned the very interesting material that we received from Harry Burns, the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, who recognised the importance of early years intervention. He focused on the recommendation that we should make this very much a public health issue. He expressed appreciation for the work of the Triple P project in the midlands of the Irish Republic. Dr Ziglio's name featured prominently in many contributions. Mr McCarthy mentioned his evidence from Slovenia, where, again, the suggestion is that, if Departments can get together and form a universal coherent policy, huge increases in health outcomes can be achieved in a very short time. So all the evidence seems to point in the same direction.

We do not normally associate North Down with health inequalities, but Gordon Dunne made a point about people who may live within a mile of each other. While one part of society enjoys extremely healthy outcomes, just down the road, there is another part of society in which problems

evident in other parts of Northern Ireland persist. He also brought up the issue of parenting skills. There is absolutely no doubt that even in deprived areas, children reared by loving, devoted and committed parents do much better than those who have a less idyllic upbringing. We must do everything that we can to promote good parenting, so I think that his point was a very useful one that we need to emphasise.

Mickey Brady quoted the very worrying statistic that 21% of the people of Northern Ireland are living in poverty. There is no doubt that that statistic is important when it comes to inequalities in health outcomes. As he knows, that figure will probably become higher and higher under social welfare reform. Therefore, we need to put resources into this before more people have poor health outcomes. He, again, emphasised the need for partnership and suggested that DRD and DETI should be involved. Without doubt, practically every Department has a role in developing better health outcomes.

Maeve McLaughlin also quoted the 10-year discrepancy in life expectancy between people living in different parts of Northern Ireland. She suggested that resources should be pumped into obtaining stronger links and partnerships with other sectors. She cited the great inequalities in alcohol-related deaths in the Western Trust, and, again, the Foyle constituency is in the top three areas for that type of inequality. She suggested a composite approach to social care.

Conall McDevitt raised a crucial issue. I do not decry for one moment the fact that it was a male Member of the Assembly who raised the very important issue of breastfeeding.

One of the things that we learned from our visit to Cuba was that the vast majority of people there are significantly poorer than those in Foyle, North Belfast and West Belfast, but they live longer. It was interesting to see how the Cuban approach delivered an average life expectancy of almost 80 for males. That is extraordinary when you consider that just down the road, Haiti, with the same population and a similar geographical position, can achieve nothing like that.

One of the points that emerged during our visit to Cuba was the almost universal level of breastfeeding by young mothers, to the extent that it was practically unheard of for that not to happen without there being a very good medical reason. Before the Chair spoke to the conference, we hurriedly rang Northern Ireland to get the equivalent figure for here, only to find that it was shockingly low. In working-class, vulnerable communities, it was absolutely dreadful. The figures quoted this morning indicate that there is no doubt that breastfeeding is crucial to the first year of a child's life. Yet we do very badly on that. Therefore, it was absolutely right of Conall McDevitt to raise the issue and make a cultural point, which was that we must make it extremely comfortable for mothers to breastfeed, when required. There must be no further stigma. I am a product of breastfeeding — I do not know whether that is good or bad. Certainly, my three children also are, and they are healthier and, I think, happier as a result.

Alex Easton was one of the few Members to raise the issue of the dangers of cheap junk food. Among the many things that I noticed in Cuba was the total absence of fast food. There are no large famous retail chains selling burgers, chicken or whatever. Fast food just does not exist. People do not eat fast food in Cuba, and that must also contribute. The reason for that is really nothing to do with health; it is just that many such companies are American owned and not allowed to operate in Cuba. However, I have no doubt that thousands of healthy young people in Cuba have benefited from the fact that they have no concept of a McDonalds "triple whopper burger" or whatever they are called. I do not eat them because I am a vegetarian, so it does not worry me, but you know what I mean — one of these massive cholesterol cocktails on a plate. The Cubans just do not have them, which makes their society much healthier. Therefore, if we have vulnerable communities who live on fast and unhealthy food, the outcomes will inevitably be poor. He also raised the role of the safeguarding board in promoting parenting.

I have only a couple of minutes left. One thing slightly annoys me about these debates. We have had yet another debate on a subject that should really concern all 108 MLAs. However, what has happened? We have had the Health Committee talking to itself, and the Minister has been listening in, with his chief of staff beside him. *[Laughter.]* I cannot think of a title, but I am sure that it is something as important as that.

As an Assembly, we will really have to spend a bit more time becoming interested and involved in the debates and in other Committees' issues, because, frankly, there is not much to be achieved by the 11 members of the Health Committee debating this issue in the Committee and reaching total agreement — unusually, with Mr McCarthy there — and then coming to the Floor of the Assembly and reaching total agreement with little or no involvement from anyone else. We have had that again today, but at least we have the Minister here to respond. I think that this is becoming more and more of a burning issue.

Ms S Ramsey: I thank the Member for giving way. For Members' information, there are only nine recommendations in the report. It is not a big report, and it is on the Committee website, so people should take their time to read it. I think that you are absolutely right: health is everybody's business.

Mr Wells: There is a quick plug for the Committee's work. I will just finish with this point. It is totally wrong that we can have a society where someone is doomed to live nine years fewer simply by accident of birth. If he is born in the Shankill, the Short Strand or the Bogside, that person is more or less doomed to live nine years fewer than somebody he can see across the motorway and who is, perhaps, living on the Upper Malone Road, simply because of that accident. That cannot be tolerated any longer.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of health inequalities; notes the recommendations relating to the restructuring of government Departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the recommendations in the report with the ministerial group on public health and to action those that are within his remit.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time will begin at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: I remind Members not to be seen to be reading out their supplementary question. Members should refer only to their notes.

Budget: Prime Minister

1. **Mr D Bradley** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations they intend to make to the Prime Minister prior to the forthcoming Budget. *(AQO 3399/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Representations concerning tax, fiscal and public expenditure issues are made on an ongoing basis. The Minister of Finance and Personnel's quadrilateral meetings, which are usually held at least twice a year, represent the formal process whereby we engage with Treasury Ministers on public expenditure and taxation issues. Separate bilateral meetings are also held on tax and fiscal issues.

Our representations have resulted in the abolition of air passenger duty (APD) on direct long-haul flights and reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing flexibility for the A5 road project. At our meeting with David Cameron during his visit in November 2012, we discussed the general implications of devolving corporation tax and agreed then that we would have a further meeting.

As Members will be aware, the final report of the findings of the joint ministerial working group was sent to David Cameron for consideration in November. The British Government must now decide whether corporation tax powers will be devolved to the Executive. David Cameron wrote to us last month to confirm that he will meet us again to hear our views on corporation tax in detail and that his office will work with ours to identify a suitable date. We continue to press for that meeting to take place as soon as possible. We hope that it will take place before the March 2013 Budget, but a decision is not directly linked to the Budget.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an LeasChéad Aire as an fhreagra a thug sé. I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. In the light of the £25 million that has been expended on policing the flag protests, would he support a bid by the PSNI to the Treasury security fund for the replacement of that money?

Mr M McGuinness: That is a matter for the Policing Board and the PSNI. The events of the past number of months have obviously been very difficult and a very serious challenge not only to the PSNI but to these institutions. I look forward to more peaceful times in future, and I am conscious that people are flagging up the real challenges that we all might face over the next seven or eight months. I hope that everyone will do all in their power to ensure that everything passes over peacefully. However, if the Policing Board, the PSNI and the Minister of Justice were to make a case to the First Minister and me that we should raise with the British Government directly the issue of replacing the money that has already been spent by the PSNI, I think we would be more than willing to do so.

Mr Dunne: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers. Given the huge expenses that have been paid to the MPs from his party, will he confirm that he will now instruct them to take their seat and vote against the Budget cuts?

Mr M McGuinness: There is a very short answer to that question and a very long-winded answer: the short answer is no.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the deputy First Minister agree that the absence of complete and accurate figures for the North's revenues and the reliance on Estimates from the British Treasury pose a real problem for the Executive in developing a comprehensive economic strategy?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, I agree. Current Estimates employed by the British Treasury are based on assumptions and tend to vary widely. The Executive are doing our best to help our people through the economic downturn and financial crisis, but we find that we are limited in what we can do. If we had access to accurate information, it would be of help. It is an issue not just for us but for Scotland and Wales. I believe that all the Administrations should have access to a proper statement of public accounts. We do not have that at present.

The House should be reminded again that the First Minister and I have, at every opportunity, spoken to the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, about the reneging on a financial commitment that was at the heart of establishing these institutions five years ago. In quite a number of meetings with other British Government Ministers, not least Theresa Villiers, the Secretary of State, we have reiterated the real difficulties that have been presented, particularly for our construction industry, by the resiling of the British Government from the financial commitment, which was described by both Gordon Brown and Tony Blair over five years ago as ring-fenced and guaranteed. It is also important to point out that that financial commitment was made in the course of very important negotiations at St Andrews, which all the parties in this House were at. Of course, the Irish Government were also present. I would like the Irish Government to remind the British Government of the financial commitment that was made at that time and to urge the British Government to fulfil the agreement that was made, which resulted in the establishment of these institutions, which, in my view, have proven to be very successful.

Goods, Facilities and Services Legislation

2. **Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when goods, facilities and services legislation will be brought forward. *(AQO 3400/11-15)*

9. **Mr McElduff** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the legislation in regard to goods, facilities and services. *(AQO 3407/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will take questions 2 and 9 together.

The Programme for Government commitment to extend age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services requires that legislation to be taken through the Assembly by 31 March 2015. Currently, anti-discrimination legislation in relation to age is limited to the fields of employment, vocational training and further and higher education. Prior to a new Bill being introduced to the Assembly, a considerable number of steps have to be undertaken to progress through the required legislative stages. We are currently considering the scope of the legislation to ensure that it achieves its intended outcome. We aim to have the legislation in place during the latter part of 2014-15, in line with the Programme for Government commitment.

Mr Weir: I will try not to break the eleventh commandment and not be seen to read out my supplementary question.

The bulk of countries have applied this on the basis of the qualifying age being 18. The exception is Australia, where it has been watered down somewhat. Can the deputy First Minister give an assurance that we will follow best international practice and set 18 as the qualifying age?

Mr M McGuinness: As the Member knows, we are giving active consideration to the scope of the legislation. Research has been commissioned into the discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services experienced by children and young people, people of working age and older people. Officials are scoping out all the issues likely to apply with each Department. Officials are working on a comparative analysis with other jurisdictions such as Australia, which the Member mentioned, to see how they have implemented similar legislation across the age sectors. All that will go towards ensuring that an informed decision is reached on the scope of the legislation.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis an LeasChéad Aire fosta as a fhreagra go dtí an pointe seo. Has the Equality Commission given the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister any indication regarding the scope and breadth of the legislation?

Mr M McGuinness: The Equality Commission is strongly opposed to the blanket exclusion of minors from statutory protection. It recommends that the legislation should be non-discriminatory and in line with the guiding principle of non-discrimination in article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In addition, when examining the scope of the legislation here, we need to be mindful of any potential breach of our section 75 duty that may make such legislation vulnerable to a legal challenge.

Mr Eastwood: Further to the other supplementary questions, can the deputy First Minister reassure the House that the legislation will not leave young people discriminated against and that that will be built into the legislation?

Mr M McGuinness: I am sure that nobody in the House wants to see any young person discriminated against. That is why I indicated in a previous answer that there was a scoping exercise taking place. Officials are very much involved in looking at a number of situations, particularly what is happening in Australia and Canada. As a result of all of that work, we will have to come to final decisions in the House so that we can ensure that the legislation meets the time frame laid out in our Programme for Government.

Mr McCarthy: Will the deputy First Minister give us any indication of the status of the single equality Bill for Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member knows as well as anybody else that, as in all of these matters, there are differing views in the House on it. He will also be aware that, in order to ensure that we bring legislation forward to deal with that issue, we need an agreement in the Executive. Thus far, we have not been in a position where we can bring forward the legislation, but no doubt that will form part of ongoing discussions.

Disability Strategy

3. **Ms Fearon** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the disability strategy. *(AQO 3401/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: Cheann Comhairle, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer the question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities places an obligation on government to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by all persons with disabilities. The involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in all facets of public life is an important aspect of the convention. The Executive's formal response to our obligations under the UN convention and the findings of the 2009 promoting social inclusion report on disability will be delivered within the context of a new disability strategy.

Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that people with disabilities and their representative organisations are not just consulted by this Administration as part of the development of government policy and strategy but are actively engaged. To fulfil our obligations, a specialist in disability was engaged and worked with our officials to develop a draft strategy, on which we consulted last year. The sectoral expert also advised us on arrangements for consultation, including the development of fully accessible documentation and consultation events. With that support, we completed a consultation exercise, and we have developed a comprehensive strategy, which has incorporated many of the views expressed during the consultation.

Arrangements are being finalised to launch and publicise the Executive's new disability strategy, and we are engaging with the disability and other sectors. In line with the view of stakeholders on the need for delivery, that will include early signature projects being taken forward within the Delivering Social Change framework.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I know that OFMDFM has an overarching role when it comes to disability issues, but will the Minister outline what specific areas the Department will bring forward in this?

Ms J McCann: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister takes the lead on disability awareness and advocacy and on monitoring, reporting and governance.

So OFMDFM will host a major inclusive conference to invite providers of all public services to gather with representatives of the disability sector and other sectors to consider how current arrangements meet the needs of people with disabilities on the basis of equality. In conjunction with people with disabilities, we will also develop a Delivering Social Change signature project to provide greater support and advocacy for people with disabilities and for their families and carers. There are a number of areas that we will look at when it comes to those signature projects. They will include action on disability awareness and advocacy; access, particularly to transport and digital inclusion; housing, employment and standard of living; tackling crime against people with disabilities; and participation in sports and leisure.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her responses. I chair the all-party group on disability, and one of the key worries and stresses for people with disabilities across Northern Ireland is the impending impact of the welfare reforms. Will the Minister outline whether those issues will be addressed and incorporated in any new disability strategy?

Ms J McCann: The Member raises a point that has been raised before on this issue. The Minister for Social Development brought proposals to the Executive for a Welfare Reform Bill to give effect locally to the proposed changes. Consultation respondents on the draft disability strategy expressed a range of views on welfare reform. It was clear that disabled people feel vulnerable about the potential changes that are about to happen, especially in relation to disability living allowance. For many, the potential of suffering a loss in what they see as their primary source of income means that much of the strategy would ring hollow if those changes were introduced. We must, therefore, consider the potential impact of welfare reform in the context of what we aim to achieve through the delivery of that strategy.

2.45 pm

Mrs Dobson: Have officials produced a report on the consultation on the disability strategy, and what is the timescale for the full publication of the strategy following Executive approval?

Ms J McCann: The purpose of 'A Strategy to Improve the Lives of Disabled People 2012-15' is to set out a high-level policy framework to give coherence and guidance to Departments' activities across general and disability-specific areas of policy. The actions that will follow the strategy will provide a framework, particularly for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and take forward that work to improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities. The strategy is about the delivery mechanism that all Departments will buy into that will improve quality of life for people with disabilities.

St Lucia Site, Omagh

4. **Mr Buchanan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the St Lucia site in Omagh. *(AQO 3402/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: Under the Hillsborough agreement, the St Lucia site, apart from the historic barracks buildings, was gifted to the Executive to raise funds from the eventual disposal of the site, which contains houses, light industrial buildings and land. The OFMDFM-owned portion of the site shares an outer boundary with the Department of Education's Lisanelly site, while the historic barracks portion is still in the ownership of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). This part of the site was subject to leasehold covenants dating from the 19th century that limited the use of the site to military purposes and required its return to the original landowners — the Archdales — should it no longer be required by the MoD. As a consequence, the property at St Lucia, which was transferred to OFMDFM in April 2011, did not include this historic core.

The houses on the site have been assessed by the Department for Social Development as not suitable for conversion to social housing. The Housing Executive has reported that there is not unmet demand for social housing in the area. While the site's potential is being assessed, it is necessary to have realistic expectations of what is feasible in the short to medium term because of the current state of the land and property market locally and regionally. It is important to raise the maximum value from the site, and consideration needs to be given to market conditions. Officials are in discussions with Omagh District Council and the Department for Social Development's regional development office regarding future possibilities for the site.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his response. Is he fully aware of the importance of the site to the future development of Omagh, given its strategic location? He touched on discussions with some of the stakeholders, such as Omagh District Council. Will he advise us on the possibility of the site being handed over, given over or gifted to the council or some other stakeholder for the future development of Omagh?

Mr M McGuinness: The Member knows that I am conscious of the strategic importance of the St Lucia and Lisanelly sites to the people of Omagh. We are all conscious of the prospect of an education campus on the Lisanelly site at some stage in the future. I said that the St Lucia site partly bordered the Lisanelly site, and the St Lucia site is full of complications by dint of historic agreements made many years ago. The development of the sites is critical, and I understand that there are ongoing discussions with Omagh District Council and the Department for Social Development about how we can take the issue forward.

In the event of there being an educational campus on the Lisanelly site, lands that are under our control at St Lucia could be made available to the education authorities for playing fields for the pupils who will inhabit that site. The issue of historic buildings is a wee bit more complicated, and I expect that the discussions between ourselves, the Department for Social Development and Omagh District Council will continue. It is important that we get a resolution of the situation with St Lucia, because we all understand that, strategically, the sites are of critical importance, not least because of their ability, if they were utilised, to free up other land and other buildings in the area that could be used for the benefit of the local community.

Mr Byrne: Does the Minister accept that, given the uncertainty that pertains to the sites, the sooner the Executive can come to some decisions, the better it will be for the people of Omagh?

Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education has pushed forward decisively with what it wishes to do with the Lisanelly site. There will be further discussions between the Department and some of the local schools that are interested — and others that may be less interested — in locating to a campus that, I think, would provide a unique sharing arrangement in education. That opportunity should not be missed, and there is a responsibility on everybody in the Omagh area to recognise the reality that the proper development of the Lisanelly site into an education campus would represent a real beacon of how we need to go forward through sharing in education. St Lucia has important land that can be utilised for playing fields for the young people on the shared education campus, but, yes, it is important that we come to an agreement on the historic nature of the buildings, which are protected buildings, and their significance to the town of Omagh, the local council and the Department for Social Development.

Mr Hussey: I want to deal specifically with the walled barracks of St Lucia Barracks. I understand from the Ministry of Defence and the Secretary of State for Defence that negotiations are under way between the Ministry of Defence and the covenant holder to buy out that covenant, and it is the understanding of the Ministry of Defence that the entire walled barracks will be offered to OFMDFM. I ask the deputy First Minister to confirm that, if that is the case, it will come into the control of OFMDFM and will be offered perhaps to Omagh District Council. Those buildings are so significant, and we do not want to see them lost to a private developer.

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree with the Member: the sites are of critical importance to the town of Omagh and are sites that Omagh District Council has a tremendous interest in. I know that there is a commonality of view between the political representatives in the House from the West Tyrone constituency on how the sites will be developed for the benefit of the local community. I certainly want them to be developed for the benefit of the local community and not for the benefit of developers.

Victims' Groups: Funding

5. **Mrs Hale** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when funding for victims groups will be confirmed. *(AQO 3403/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: The responsibility for administering victims and survivors funding to groups transferred from the Community Relations Council to the Victims and Survivors Service on 12 November 2012. The Victims and Survivors Service opened the application process for the 2013-15 victims and survivors funding programme for groups on 26 November 2012, and the application process closed on 17 December 2012. The Victims and Survivors Service is in the final stages of completing the assessment of applications from groups for funding from the victim support programme for 2013-15. Once the necessary final pre-contract checks have been completed, the service anticipates that letters of offer will be issued to successful groups from March 2013.

Mrs Hale: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Does he agree with me that it is vital that long-term funding continues to be in place for those who have been most wronged during the past decade?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, absolutely. A very clear indication of the commitment of the First Minister, me and the entire Executive to this is the reality that, in the four years between 2011 and 2015, we are spending, through the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, the Community Relations Council and the Victims and Survivors Service, close to £50 million. We absolutely accept the importance of ensuring that people who have been victims of the conflict are supported. We are also very determined to ensure that the detailed work that the Victims and Survivors Service is involved in, dealing with the individual issues that affect victims, is carried out in a cohesive and professional manner and in a way that is bespoke to their particular difficulties.

Mr McDevitt: Does the deputy First Minister agree that what many victims desperately want and need is a process of true reconciliation and a truth process getting off the ground in our jurisdiction? What conversations are he and the First Minister having —

Mr Speaker: Order. The question is very specific. It is about funding to victims' groups. Let us not widen the question. I will ask the Member to continue, but let us try to get to a supplementary to the original question.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Speaker, as always. In that case, what conversations are the deputy First Minister and the First minister having with others about funding mechanisms that would support victims and support the wider objective that I addressed in my earlier question?

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I are very conscious of the need to ensure that we support victims who have been affected by the conflict of the past. Built into the funding arrangements that deal with all the complex challenges that people face is a recognition that we have to deal with that aspect of the past. The Member is obviously tempted to ask what the resolution is to the bigger question of how we deal comprehensively with the past. There is no agreement on that. There appears not to be agreement between the British Government and the Irish Government, and there certainly is not agreement in the House. My party has put forward what, we believe, is the best way forward. I am not saying that that is the solution; others have their ideas and, no doubt, will put them forward. Many times, in the course of many interviews in recent years, I have said that one of the big failings of the agreements that have been made — the Good Friday Agreement, the St Andrews Agreement or even the Hillsborough agreement — was the failure to deal with the past. People can come at the past from their individual perspective.

We could also have a situation in which people choose to speak for victims as though they know exactly how each victim or family wants the past to be dealt with. If you go out and talk to victims' groups and to individual families affected by the past, you will find various views. So coming to an agreement that satisfies the vast majority will be very difficult, but we should not baulk at the challenge. There is a job of work to be done and discussions to be had. I hope that, at the end of those discussions, there will be agreement on how we move forward.

Mr Elliott: Will the deputy First Minister give us some outline of the locations throughout Northern Ireland where there are gaps in funding and service provision in the

victims' sector? How does he plan to deal with the issues to do with where those gaps are and ensure that nobody loses out because of the location that they live in?

Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service needs to deal with that issue. We would be very disappointed if certain parts of the North felt that they were not being adequately serviced. If the Member wants to contact me about a specific demographic or a specific location that is of concern to him, we can have that discussion and see whether we can resolve whatever difficulty is in the mind of the people who have obviously lobbied the Member on the issue.

3.00 pm

Employment and Learning

Further and Higher Education: People with Disabilities

1. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to increase further and higher educational opportunities for disabled people. *(AQO 3414/11-15)*

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Last September, I was pleased to launch Access to Success, my Department's regional strategy to widen participation in higher education. The strategy has a strong focus on the creation of a more accessible higher education sector, where people who are most able but least likely to participate are given every encouragement and support to apply to, and benefit from, higher education. The strategy identifies those groups that are still under-represented in higher education (HE), including those with disabilities and learning disabilities, and that may require additional support to take full advantage of the educational opportunity.

My Department provides some £3 million through disabled student allowances to help students with the extra costs that they may incur when studying their higher education course. The allowances can help with the cost of specialist equipment, travel and other course-related materials. They also finance one-to-one personal support to disabled students who are on higher education courses at our colleges or universities. The support providers include note-takers, dyslexia coaches and sign language interpreters. The Department also provides premium funding of around a quarter of a million pounds per annum to the higher education institutions in recognition of the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

In the further education (FE) sector, my Department provides financial support of £3·5 million per annum to assist regional colleges to discharge their responsibility towards students with learning difficulties and disabilities. That includes £2 million per annum to help to meet the cost of providing tailored, discrete courses for students who are unable to undertake a mainstream course due to the nature or degree of their disability or learning difficulty. The colleges also provide an information and advocacy resource hub, which is accessed through the Colleges Northern Ireland website and the DisabledGo service, that provides potential and existing students with accessibility information about colleges and college campuses.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for a very fulsome answer. Within what time frame is it anticipated that the sums of money that he referred to will be spent? Will that happen within the context of the Programme for Government or the current Budget allocation? Will he outline how he intends to track whether the money that has been allocated is sufficient to meet the needs of this deserving sector?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his interest in this subject, and I assure him that this remains a commitment for me, my Department and the Executive. The Executive have endorsed the widening participation strategy for higher education. The resources come from my Department's existing baselines. The figures that I quoted are spending figures in-year, and I expect that, at the very least, we will seek to maintain them into the future. We will certainly look to increase them where appropriate.

Again, universities are required to have access agreements with the Department that are signed, produced and reviewed every year. That is the means by which we hold the higher education providers to account for their delivery. As to the further education sector, we have ongoing discussions with the colleges, and there is a deep commitment from all the providers to ensure that they are accessible to all sections of the community. That is because, ultimately, we want to ensure that we are developing every talent in society to its maximum potential.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Given that there is a strong post-19 lobby group looking for greater provision of services for those with learning disabilities, what engagement has the Minister had with Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon and with other such groups in that sector?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for that question. I cannot comment on the very specific engagement that she mentioned, but I am very conscious that post-19 provision is an issue that concerns a wide range of people. I know that there have been discussions in the Health Committee, the Education Committee and the Employment and Learning Committee on that.

We have a range of programmes that address the employability opportunities of young people who perhaps have some learning disabilities or wider disabilities. We are very happy to engage with them. Those types of policy are always under review so that we can make sure that we are getting it right, because I appreciate that it is an area where we need to ensure that we are fully engaging with the young people in question.

Mr P Ramsey: I give the Minister's statement to the House a warm welcome, particularly the £3·5 million to colleges for students with a learning or physical disability. I want to home in on the specific matter of those who are deaf or hard of hearing. What specific programmes or actions are being promoted on widening participation to include those groups?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ramsey for his ongoing interest in the area. This applies to how we can use the resources available to provide very discreet, one-to-one interventions to assist people with a whole range of different barriers, including those with hearing difficulties. There are services

in both the FE and higher education settings where, for example, assistance can be given for taking notes and engaging with lecturers. That one-to-one service is available, and it is hoped that it will address the particular needs of that category of people.

Steps 2 Success

2. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department has received any formal representations from companies which are seeking to compete for the Steps 2 Success programme contract. *(AQO 3415/11-15)*

13. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Steps 2 Success programme. *(AQO 3426/11-15)*

Dr Farry: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will group questions 2 and 13. I also request an additional minute for the answer.

My Department is currently working on the development of the Steps 2 Success programme, which will replace Steps to Work in 2014. The Steps 2 Success public consultation exercise received over 80 responses from a range of organisations. Respondents raised a number of key issues around the proposed programme objectives, eligibility and content. There was also significant interest in proposals on the contract area and duration of the programme, supply chain management and funding.

The responses have been analysed, and the key design features of the new programme are being finalised. The new programme will demonstrate that the Department has listened to the feedback received from the consultation exercise and will blend some of the successful elements of Steps to Work with the best of what is being delivered elsewhere. The Department believes that that will bring forward a programme specifically designed for Northern Ireland that will serve all unemployed clients well.

As the Department has not yet finalised the design of Steps 2 Success, it is not able to receive formal representations from companies seeking to compete for Steps 2 Success contracts. Officials have met, at their request, a number of organisations that are actively considering whether they will bid to deliver Steps 2 Success, either as a lead contractor or as a subcontractor in the supply chain. Their purpose has been to update on progress made in developing the programme. No information has been given to organisations at those meetings that is not already in the public domain. Officials have also ensured that organisations delivering other departmental provision have been kept up to date about Steps 2 Success.

Steps to Work currently delivers a quality service that helps people in Northern Ireland move into work. Steps 2 Success is being developed to build on that service and to ensure that we continue to offer unemployed people a range of supports to help them find and keep a job. Details of the programme will be published shortly, and that will be followed by a two-stage procurement process under the guidance of the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). It is anticipated that that will be completed by November 2013, with the programme starting in 2014. Details of the procurement process will be formally publicised on the CPD website.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. Will he state when the tendering process is likely to happen? Will it be a single contract for all Northern Ireland or will there be regional variations to make sure that we have the right quality-assurance scheme? It is crucial that we have a qualitative training scheme for the unemployed.

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Byrne for his question. We are finalising the design of the programme, and we will be seeking to go out to procurement within the next couple of months. On the Member's specific question around contract areas, he will be aware that the original consultation highlighted the potential for Northern Ireland to be one contract area. However, members of the Committee will be aware that the current thinking is around the potential for three contract areas across Northern Ireland. The final decisions have not yet been taken, but it is more than likely that that will be the future design. We will come back to the House to confirm that as soon as we have taken those final decisions.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister confirm that, when it is up and running, the principles behind Steps 2 Success will be adopted in many of the programmes that are currently in constituencies so that young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), are made aware of the training that is available to try to get them into work?

Dr Farry: It is important to understand that Steps 2 Success will be our main return-to-work programme, and it will apply to all age groups. Beyond that, we have a number of specific interventions that address the needs of young people primarily, but Step Ahead 50+ is also there to address slightly older members of the workforce who have not had the opportunities for jobs recently.

The provisions that we have through the youth employment scheme and some of the NEETs projects will offer more intensive work for people who find themselves in those difficult situations than would be available through the more general mainstream provisions. Even with that, we are moving ahead with Steps 2 Success to try to achieve a more individually tailored approach that meets the needs of individual clients a lot better. More flexibility will be given to the contractors and subcontractors in that regard.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. In answers to questions in the Committee, we were told that up to £5 million might be top-sliced from the £40 million being allocated to the Steps 2 Success programme just to cover administration by whichever three contractors are successful. What will the Minister do to ensure that the overwhelming majority of any funds allocated for the scheme will go directly into putting schemes in place and will not be there for administrators that come in, maybe from Britain, to administer the scheme, which they will simply top-slice off?

Dr Farry: I understand the concerns that the Member has raised. First, it is important to say that, at this stage, we cannot assume the nature of any successful, or otherwise, bidders for these contracts. I will assure him in this regard: I stress that the scheme is not designed as a cost-saving exercise. That is not in my mind, and it is not in the mind of the officials in the Department. This is about ensuring that we do the best that we can to design a work programme

that will assist people who are unemployed, particularly those who are long-term unemployed, into work. The scheme will be judged on how successful we are in respect of those types of outcomes.

We are seeking to learn the best lessons of what happens in other jurisdictions in that regard and to avoid the bad lessons that are already apparent from those types of projects in other areas. Obviously, there will be some overhead costs involved for the companies that will be involved in all this, but, given that we are going out for procurement, there is a clear aim to achieve best value and to ensure that the system for delivering the services is as lean as we possibly can get it and that we are maximising the impact of our scarce resources on the front line.

Mr Speaker: Caitríona Ruane is not in her place for question 3. Chris Lyttle is not in his place for question 4, and Patsy McGlone is not in his place for question 5.

Programme-led Apprenticeships

6. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he plans to address the lack of work placement opportunities available to people enrolled in the programme-led apprenticeship scheme. *(AQO 3419/11-15)*

Dr Farry: I congratulate Mr Newton on his diligence in being here. Programme-led apprenticeships were introduced in September 2009 as an intervention measure during the current economic downturn. The Department recognised that, in the current economic climate, it was unlikely that young people wishing to be apprentices would secure employment at the outset.

The programme aims to ensure that young people assessed as capable of achieving an apprenticeship qualification at level 2, but who have not yet secured employment, are prepared for future progression to employment as an apprentice. The benefit of the programme is that participants follow the same apprenticeship framework as those following the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI provision so that they have developed good underpinning skills before they gain employment.

I am aware that some training providers are finding it difficult to source the requisite work placements for participants on the programme-led apprenticeship programme. My Department has urged the providers of training to continue their efforts in search of placements, but that is particularly difficult in the current economic climate. They are encouraged to contact public sector bodies operating in their locality, such as health and social services trusts and district councils, to explore further placement opportunities. In the current offering, I must stress that the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, which is employer led, must always be the preferred option. It requires the continued support of employers, and I encourage them to reconsider the value of apprenticeships and the benefits that they can bring to their businesses.

3.15 pm

On Monday 11 February, I made a statement to the Assembly outlining my intention to undertake a major review of policy on apprenticeships and youth training. The review will explore how we can engage more with employers on the training curriculum and improve young people's employability skills through measures such as work placements.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answer so far, but I did ask specifically what he would do to achieve placements. Will the Minister agree that this programme-led apprenticeship scheme was introduced as an interim measure, and that to continue with the same approach does a disservice to young people, employers and the overall economy?

Dr Farry: I fully understand the Member's comments, and I want just to address two or three aspects. First, we are working with the public sector to try to maximise the number of placements. Secondly, in my main answer I stressed that I regard this as being a temporary intervention that was made by my predecessor in the context of economic downturn and a lack of opportunities for employers. Our current policy is to regard the mainstream ApprenticeshipsNI programme, which deals directly with employers, as being the preferred route because it is much better for a young person to be learning on a job than learning purely in a college or training provider setting with, perhaps, the prospect of a placement.

I appreciate the Member's ongoing interest in the topic of apprenticeships, and he is fully aware that we launched a review last week. It is my intention that that review will be comprehensive and cover the future of programme-led apprenticeships. I want to ensure that we have a model that works best for young people, giving them the maximum opportunities, and also works for employers as well.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, will you tell us, though, exactly how successful or unsuccessful programme-led apprenticeships have actually been? I heard it reported that only 30% on such schemes actually get some employment. What steps are your Department taking to try to improve such schemes?

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for his question and his interest in this topic. Obviously, programme-led apprenticeships have been a challenge, and in my answer to Mr Newton I indicated that they were far from ideal in terms of the type of intervention that we are making.

Presently about 5,000 people are participating in programme-led apprenticeships, compared with about 11,000 in ApprenticeshipsNI. Almost half as many are in the programme-led apprenticeship scheme. I would prefer that that entire provision could be catered for in terms of the workplace. When someone is training as an apprentice through the mainstream scheme, they are an employee and have a job that they are currently undertaking. Only about 60% of those in programme-led apprenticeships have a placement; about 40% do not. That is clearly a matter of concern, and we need the support of employers to maximise that. In that regard, we are encouraging the public sector to consider what it can do to assist.

Mr Elliott: Following on from those questions about the programme-led apprenticeships scheme being an interim measure, what exploration has there been with the private sector to establish an industry-led scheme that would replace that scheme?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Elliott for his comments. He will appreciate that we are involved in an advertisement

campaign around the ApprenticeshipsNI scheme. Although we are reviewing all our apprenticeship programmes, as of now we are seeking to maximise the uptake of the current offering.

Last year, the 'Belfast Telegraph' ran a successful campaign to highlight the benefit of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, however, we can only work in the context of employers coming forward and offering opportunities, and young people being prepared to take them. So, it is important that we continue to encourage both those groups to come forward for something that is to their mutual benefit and the success of the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers. Has the Minister read the Hansard report of the presentation by NIE as part of a CBI delegation to the Committee for Employment and Learning a couple of weeks ago, when serious concerns were raised about the apprenticeships that it applied for?

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to a question.

Mr F McCann: That is the question. I am asking what can be done to ensure that that is dealt with.

Dr Farry: I am certainly very much aware of the discussions, and the presentation that was given by the CBI to the Committee. I make it a habit to study the Minutes of Evidence from the Committee. Beyond that, I have had direct discussions with NIE itself, which has recounted to me its experiences with this. Those discussions reinforced the need for us to encourage more and more young people to consider going down the apprenticeship route and the need to work to ensure that our young people at pre-apprenticeship level have the employability skills, essential skills and motivation to take on an apprenticeship. I commend the very positive leadership that NIE continues to present through its engagement in the training of young people.

Youth Unemployment

7. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the programmes currently in operation to assist people to get into education, employment or training. *(AQO 3420/11-15)*

Dr Farry: My Department provides a range of programmes to help unemployed young people get into education, employment and training. I will outline the main programmes in operation and the new initiatives specifically designed to reduce youth unemployment. Those are in addition to my Department's main Steps to Work programme, which is designed to improve people's employment prospects and help people into work.

The Training for Success programme offers a guarantee of a training place to all unemployed 16- to 17-year-olds to enable them to develop occupational, employability and essential skills. The youth employment scheme offers unemployed 18- to 24-year-olds work experience placements and the chance to develop job-specific skills. An employer subsidy of £5,000 is available in key growth sectors.

Under the Steps to Work programme, the first start initiative offers waged opportunities for 18- to 24-year-olds. In addition, my Department's disability employment service provides programmes to help young people with disabilities progress towards and move into employment; programmes such as Workable (NI), Access to Work, Work Connect and the job introduction scheme.

Building on those programmes, my Department has introduced a number of new initiatives under the Executive's Pathways to Success, the NEETs strategy, specifically for unemployed young people. Those new initiatives include the collaboration and innovation fund, which provides support to help disadvantaged 16- to 24-year-olds improve their employability through the acquisition of economically relevant skills; the community family support pilot programme, which helps the most disadvantaged families in targeted areas by supporting parents and helping all family members to re-engage with education, employment or training; and the community-based access programme, which will enable 16- to 18-year-olds to increase their essential skills qualifications and progress into further education or government-funded training.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that, due to the wide range of schemes available, it is a complicated area to get advice on? Would he consider setting up a one-stop shop for advice to enable easier access for NEETs?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. I entirely understand the point that she is making. One key aspect in the NEETs strategy is the focus on the one-to-one mentoring of the young people in question. The Careers Service is very keen to take that forward. We fully appreciate that, to really make a difference to young people, particularly those who are facing real barriers, one-to-one interaction will be required; as, indeed, will signposting, which can be provided, to make sure that they are aware of and can access the most appropriate schemes available.

Mr Storey: Does the Minister not believe that the initiatives he listed in response to the original question are working in a policy vacuum, given the fact that the Education Minister has refused to ensure that there is a policy for 14- to 19-year-olds? Will he tell the House what interaction or joined-up approach there is between his Department and the Department of Education to ensure that there is an overall provision to the benefit of young people and not the benefit of silo Departments, as clearly seems to be the way of doing business at the moment?

Dr Farry: There is no policy vacuum. The overall NEETs strategy has been endorsed by the Executive and is an interdepartmental strategy. That includes the Department of Education. In particular, one of the things that we are keen to develop in partnership with that Department is a tracking system for young people throughout the system. At present, it tends to break off when transfers are being made between different stages.

I fully appreciate the importance of a 14-19 strategy and that we need clear funding of an entitlement framework as a subsection of that. I further appreciate that the Salisbury review has made a number of recommendations in that regard. I am also aware that the Member has a motion down for debate in the very near future. My officials and

I continue to engage with the Department of Education around those issues, and I know that the Minister of Education is keen to ensure that, collectively, we deliver the best for the young people of Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. What mechanisms does the Minister have to assess the success of the wide variety of schemes that he has outlined here today, to show that they are working in getting young people into long-term employment?

Dr Farry: The Member is correct to say that we need to ensure that we are delivering in all of the schemes that we have out there. The main means by which we will do that is by having a clear understanding of the baselines that we start with and tracking the progress in that regard.

We want to see a decrease in the number of people who are falling into the NEET category and in the number who fall into youth unemployment. You will also be aware that the Executive have tasked my Department, alongside the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), with producing a strategy on economic inactivity. Again, we will want to see changes happening with regard to the number of people who fall into those categories. Indeed, we will be bringing a paper to our various Committees and to the Floor of the Assembly in that regard in the very near future.

Engineering: Skills Shortages

8. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what his Department is doing to ensure a joined-up approach to addressing skills shortages in the engineering sector. *(AQO 3421/11-15)*

Dr Farry: To address skills shortages in the engineering sector, I chair the advanced manufacturing and engineering services working group. That working group consists of employers from the sector and representatives from the further education colleges, universities, employer bodies and other Departments. It aims to agree a co-ordinated approach to the skills needs of the sector and to put in place relevant interventions in the three areas of skills provision, sector attractiveness, and co-ordination and communication.

To gain a better understanding of the skills demand in the sector, my Department has commissioned research to ascertain the likely skills shortages there will be over the next three years. The research will assess the skills profile of the sector, carry out a salary survey and highlight any skills imbalances that currently exist or are forecast to exist. It will include statistical modelling work, which will examine the demand for skills under a range of scenarios over the short, medium and longer term. That key piece of work is expected to be finalised in summer 2013 and will inform the further population of the action plan for agreement by the group.

In the meantime, a number of actions are already being taken forward. Work with employers and colleges is under way to explore the introduction of relevant short-term specialist engineering conversion courses and an aerospace academy. Discussions are also well advanced about the establishment of a higher level apprenticeship in engineering, and I expect that those will be concluded shortly. Recently, I made a statement to the Assembly outlining my intention to undertake a major review of apprenticeships and youth training. That review will conclude in autumn 2013. All of that work supports the wider aims of the Executive's science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) strategy, which identifies actions to encourage more people to study those subjects, including engineering.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Can the Minister give a little bit more detail on what discussions he has had with engineering companies over the past six months on how we can ensure a more joined-up approach going forward?

Dr Farry: Again, I thank the Member for his interest in this topic. The establishment of the working group was very much informed by concerns that were being brought to me directly by engineering companies and, indirectly, via a number of Members. The skills adviser for Northern Ireland, Bill McGinnis, did a scoping exercise in discussion with a number of companies from the sector. We also had a stakeholder forum event in the Stormont Hotel, last June, at which a number of issues were aired. Finally, a number of employers sit on the working group and are involved directly in the discussions that we have. We also have representative bodies from business, which reflect the views of their individual members.

3.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. That concludes Question Time. Before we move on to the next item of business, I want to point out that quite a number of Members were not in their places for Question Time. I know of no other elected institution where that would be tolerated. I expect Members who were not in their places this afternoon to, at their first opportunity, come to the House, give a reason and apologise to this House. I assure Members who, for whatever reason, feel that they cannot do so that I will deal with the matter properly and procedurally. It cannot go on that Members just do not turn up and do not give a reason. Certainly, if it continues, I will deal with it. From here on, I expect Members to come to the House, give a reason and apologise to this House. Let us move on.

Committee Business

Sustainable Energy

Mr Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes 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 McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise that I was not in my place earlier. I had been in the Chamber, but I left to attend a social function with the intention of being back on time. Unfortunately, however, two other Members were not in their places during that time. My profuse apologies to you for that.

Mr Speaker: You were in the Chamber, out of the Chamber, and then I noticed you in the Public Gallery, so I know that it was not deliberate. I think that I need to say that. We will keep a watching brief on Members who do not come to the House to apologise or give a reason, and we will deal with them. The Member may continue.

Mr McGlone: I thank you for your understanding, Mr Speaker, and, obviously, your observation.

I beg to move

> *That this Assembly calls on the Executive to encourage and support further growth in the sustainable energy sector to help maximise government's contribution to creating sustainable, high-value jobs in the renewable energy sector, developing the green economy, enhancing security of supply and encouraging consumers to use renewable energy.*

In February 2011, the previous Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment reported on its inquiry into the barriers to developing renewable energy. The Department has provided regular and timely updates to the current Committee on progress with the implementation of recommendations from that inquiry. Indeed, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and other Departments are to be commended on their efforts to implement many of the recommendations for which they have lead responsibility, such as the inclusion of interim targets for renewable electricity and renewable heat in the strategic energy framework; representatives from business, academia and the renewable energy sector now being included on key subgroups for renewable heat, grid development and planning; DETI's working with the financial sector to educate and provide awareness of the long-term security of renewable energy incentivisation; the development and implementation of a renewable heat incentive; new building regulations being introduced by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) to improve the thermal performance of buildings; efforts by the Utility Regulator to improve the transparency of costs for renewable energy grid connections; and steps by the Department of the Environment (DOE) to improve consistency in planning consents and increase permitted development rights for renewable energy installations in the domestic, business and agricultural sectors.

However, a number of the inquiry's recommendations that were either accepted or partially accepted have not yet been implemented. The disparate nature of energy vires may have contributed to that to some extent.

The fact that there are so many Departments with responsibility for energy matters was identified in the inquiry as a contributory factor to preventing the efficient and effective roll-out of renewable energy opportunities by the Executive. The Committee supported the call in the Barnett review of economic policy for the Executive to provide clear focus and leadership to the range of energy policy issues as a separate and distinct government priority. Although the Department informed the Committee over a year ago that the consolidation of energy functions should be revisited at some time in the future, the Committee still awaits the outcomes of a cost-benefit analysis that the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group (SEIDWG) considered in November.

At the core of any long-term strategy there must be a long-term vision. The inquiry recommended the development of a long-term vision for renewable energy to 2050 and beyond. The Department accepted that, and, as agreed with the Committee, the Department established a sustainable energy action plan, which the Executive approved in April last year. However, today, more than two years after the renewable energy inquiry report, that long-term vision has yet to be developed. Indeed, the Department only recently appointed external consultants to carry out a study with a view to establishing that long-term vision.

To inform the establishment of a vision, a series of stakeholder events will be held next week that will contribute to a report later in the spring. The Minister may be in a position now to provide more detail to the House on how and when a long-term vision for renewable energy will be established.

The need to make certain renewable technologies mandatory was an inquiry recommendation that DFP accepted. In June 2011, DFP informed the Committee that, from 2013 onwards, it was likely that some form of renewable energy would be necessary to meet the proposed building regulation requirements. However, having considered its latest update in November, it seems that DFP has done nothing beyond putting in place new building regulations to improve the thermal performance of buildings.

The Committee recommended that the Executive take forward the green new deal. However, in May 2012, DFP decided instead to opt for a boiler replacement scheme. Although such a scheme is to be welcomed, it will benefit consumers by having their boilers replaced by existing engineers using boilers that are manufactured outside Northern Ireland. If we are to grow our green economy, we need to provide further incentives for domestic energy-saving technologies and renewable technologies that provide opportunities to generate new jobs and new business opportunities in green manufacturing, construction, installation, servicing and maintenance.

Of course, the renewable heat incentive will contribute to that when phase two is launched later this year. However, that needs to be coupled with incentives for energy efficiency to ensure that we increase the use of renewable sources of energy in an environment where overall energy

usage is falling because of efficiency measures. It is only in that way that renewable energy can really start to contribute significantly to security of supply.

The inquiry called on the Executive to bring forward a programme to develop the renewable energy potential of public buildings. The Committee was informed by DETI and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in June 2011 that regulations exist that put a duty on responsible authorities to take appropriate steps to ensure that a public building that was constructed after 31 December 2011 or that has undergone major renovation after that date fulfils an exemplary role in the context of the renewable energy directive. Although it is unclear what exactly that means, I am personally aware of a number of new or recently renovated public buildings where renewable energy technologies simply have not been availed of. That also came up recently at a meeting that I attended with key sectors in the industry. If the public sector is not encouraging the use of renewable energy, how can the Executive encourage others to do so? That is a key point.

Since the previous Committee's inquiry, the Department has done a lot of good work to implement many of the recommendations. I thank and commend the Minister for that. However, a number of the key recommendations that were accepted have not yet been implemented. It should be said, however, that DETI does not have lead responsibility for most of them. They can be summarised as follows: consolidating responsibility for energy vires; developing a long-term vision for renewable energy; making certain renewable technologies mandatory for new buildings; incentivising domestic renewable energy and energy efficiencies to create high-value jobs and business opportunities; and leading by example by ensuring that, for public buildings, every opportunity is taken to avail of renewable technologies.

Those are the very recommendations that can contribute most to creating sustainable, high-value jobs in the renewable sector, developing the green economy and encouraging consumers to use renewable energies with the environment at its core.

The Executive must lead by example. We have an excellent opportunity to exploit the many opportunities presented by the development of renewable energy technologies. The Committee wants to encourage continued growth in the sector. The Carbon Trust's estimates are very encouraging. It estimates that, by 2020, between 8,000 and 33,000 more jobs could be created from renewable energy. The future actions taken by the Executive will have a significant influence on whether the actual figure is closer to 8,000 or 33,000. The future of many of our people depends on that.

If the upper estimate for jobs is to be realised, the Executive must fully consider the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) report on skills requirements in the renewables sector. The report estimates that up to 5,880 more skilled people will be needed by 2015 to integrate renewable technologies and energy efficiency measures into existing buildings; for offshore wind and tidal installations; for bioenergy technologies; and for energy storage. That report was published in 2011. To what extent have the Executive taken on the report's findings? Has enough been done to date to ensure that the skills are in place as they are needed? The last thing that we need is for businesses to consider locating elsewhere because we did not act to address a skills gap that has clearly been identified.

At its meeting last week, the Committee considered the statement from the Minister for Employment and Learning on his review of apprenticeships and youth training. The Minister highlighted the need to match skills to the needs of employers. The great potential for employment in the renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors will be realised only if we have in place the appropriate skills at the appropriate time, and matched to the needs of employers and potential employers in the renewable sector.

It is essential that there be a much more integrated approach in the Executive to renewable energy to create the right conditions in which to develop the renewable energy business and the employment opportunities that undoubtedly exist. There is also potential to develop our green economy —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr McGlone: — through the opportunities that exist for supporting innovation, research and development, and the export of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies for the benefit of the economy.

Mr Newton: I welcome the motion. When it was first drafted, the word "further" did not appear in the first line. That is a small but important point, because we need to recognise the work and growth that has been happening in the area. The inclusion of "further" was critical. I say that because we need to recognise that the Minister has already done some good work. I note that the Committee Chairman paid tribute to her for that. That work has taken place in a holistic way that has seen a range of renewable technology initiatives taking place. The strategic energy framework (SEF) has been put in place. Invest Northern Ireland identified wind, marine, bioenergy and resource efficiency as areas in which there could be major growth.

I will mention three specific areas: the first is the skills base that is necessary in the area, which the Chairman mentioned; the second is communications; and the third is the potential incentives, if I get that far.

In August 2011, the Department for Employment and Learning published a study that sought to determine the skills required to support the potential economic growth in the Northern Ireland sustainable sector. It should be noted that, despite the fact that the study concentrated on only a small number of sub-sectors, the report identified a number of major concerns. Those included a decline in the number of people pursuing high-level mechanical and electrical courses. That is an area on which the House has concentrated its energies before. There is a need for multidisciplinary, skilled workers to meet the crossover of disciplines at all levels. For example, there is a need for ICT and engineering skills crossover in the development of the smart grid. There is the possibility that current public sector funding constraints will make additional public intervention and funding courses difficult, hence the need for the Employment and Learning Minister to perhaps concentrate his energies on making bids, where he can, for additional money.

3.45 pm

An issue that gives me and I am sure many others cause for concern is that any large incoming company will likely have to source many of its initial requirements from outside Northern Ireland. That says that the skills base in this area is not here and, if we secure inward investment, those jobs are likely to go to people from outside Northern Ireland. The most promising route to address that appears to be to provide a healthy supply of labour market entrants with STEM subject qualifications in science, technology, engineering and maths. That is an important piece of work that must be done to underpin and take forward a renewables strategy. It cannot be down to only one Minister to deliver on this; it is a cross-sectoral issue, and is of particular importance for DEL.

Many organisations provide information, advice and support about renewable energy, and communication by government is obviously critical: communication between government and the public, between government and the business sector, and within government. We must have that cross-sectoral approach, which the Chairman spoke about. I know that the Minister will want to ensure that communications are effective and that that area will be addressed. However, communication is two-way. The public need to seek the information as much as government must provide it, and the business sector also has to communicate with government. If it is not a two-way thing, and there is a breakdown, we just are not going to get there.

It is imperative to communicate with and educate the public. An enhanced programme for how we do that must be considered. However it is achieved, there is a need to continue to communicate consistently and effectively —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Newton: — across all Departments and with the public and the business sector.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I speak as a member of the ETI Committee in support of the motion. We have to start from the premise that people at home and in businesses are struggling daily with the cost of energy. In 2008, electricity customers in the North of Ireland endured a 53% increase in the price of electricity. In a recent evidence session, the Consumer Council highlighted how home heating oil has increased in price by 63% over the past three years. Therefore, as has been accepted, the energy strategy must move away from its dependence on fossil fuels towards much more of our energy coming from renewable sources.

The strategic energy framework confirmed new renewable energy targets, which have been referred to, of achieving 40% renewable electricity and 10% renewable heat by 2020. Are we doing enough to meet those targets and to promote further growth? The low-carbon and environmental sectors saw a 2·8% increase in employment between 2009-2010 and 2010-11. The Carbon Trust estimates that renewable energy could create between 8,470 and 33,124 jobs by 2020. Those targets will, of course, depend on the aggressiveness of companies in exploiting the supply chain opportunities that are likely to emerge from the growth in renewables.

I join others in highlighting the skills required by that sector. The 2010 DEL report suggested that an additional 3,327 skilled persons would be required between 2011 and 2015; that the six regional colleges are considered a key element in meeting that vocational need; and that the main training need would be a reskilling away from traditional trades, for which some colleges have already developed a range of courses. But do all of our regional colleges have a clear vision and a strategy for the development of the renewable energy sector?

Energy storage — and, more specifically, the development of a smart grid — is seen as one area where graduate-level skills are needed. NIE points out that it finds it difficult to recruit power engineers and will face greater recruitment problems over the next few years due to an ageing workforce. The main response here, in my view, will come through a STEM initiative. Although much work has been done on renewable energy, it has been done in the absence of an overall vision for renewable energy. The main document outlining Government policy is the strategic energy framework. That extends to 2020, but does not contain interim targets or milestones, apart from for the level of electricity consumed to be from renewable sources by 2020.

Although there is a move — and I welcome it — from DETI to increase incentives for renewable energy, in some cases there is a sense from potential developers that those incentives may improve in the future. Therefore, some developers are not convinced that now is the time to invest. Opportunities were clearly missed to take advantage of funding for research and development under European framework programme 7.

There are major disparities North and South. The North, across that programme, drew down in the region of €30 million, and in the Twenty-six Counties the figure was just under €500 million. It is therefore vital that more is done to support the sector, under both the new Horizon 2020 framework and any other funding opportunities that are available. The Green New Deal Group estimated that additional investment for a green recovery package could be in the region of £900 million, and also pointed out the housing fund, which is designed to enable the energy retrofit of 500,000 homes over a 10-year period.

In conclusion, it remains the case that very few public buildings are using renewable sources and that 42% of our households are in fuel poverty. It is therefore vital that more is done to support a clear vision and an action plan to support further growth in the sustainable energy sector. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Overend: I rise to speak in favour of the motion. Supporting growth in the sustainable energy sector is important for a number of reasons already mentioned today, including jobs, the environment and security of supply. The motion refers to that. It is a motion that the Committee felt was relevant to bring for debate in the House, given the work undertaken over previous years in a number of areas.

I will begin by highlighting some of the recent good news stories in the renewable energy sector. I think specifically of the SeaGen tidal turbine installed in Strangford lough, which is a world leader in that field. As well as that, we have seen a £50 million investment by Belfast harbour to develop a new terminal for the assembly of offshore wind turbines, which will be utilised by DONG Energy for its future Irish Sea operations. Another example is the

ongoing work off the north Antrim coast, where licences were granted in October last year for three renewable energy projects. Those are all positive examples of what can be achieved in Northern Ireland with the right focus and investment.

A renewable energy inquiry was taken forward in 2010 by the previous ETI Committee. A number of recommendations were brought forward at the conclusion of that inquiry and published on 27 January 2011. The recommendations covered a vast range of areas, including government vision, strategy and policy, communications, development of technology for renewable energy, support for business, grid infrastructure and connection, and planning and consents. The Committee has received regular updates on the implementation of those recommendations, most recently on 17 December 2012, when the Chair received a letter from the head of DETI's energy division.

We are now aware that, while work has been ongoing in relation to a number of the recommendations, such as the electricity market reform (EMR) seminar held in June 2012 and the decision to launch the boiler replacement scheme in December, there is still work to do. For example, analysis to evaluate the structure of small-scale feed-in tariff (FIT) levels and associated small-scale ROC branding levels for the period prior to the FIT being introduced is due to be completed by March. Perhaps the Minister could update the House on the progress of that work.

As well as that, the long-term vision for energy in Northern Ireland to 2050 is still being worked on. The Committee was informed that consultants are being used to aid this project. Again, I ask the Minister to clarify where that process is at and when we should expect to finalise the long-term vision that is so vital to this sector.

Given the high levels of unemployment in Northern Ireland, which have been consistently around 8% as well as being the UK average for some time, it is more important than ever that jobs are maximised in every sector of our economy. The green economy is no different in that respect.

A briefing provided by the Assembly's Research and Information Service has considered this issue in detail and has found that a number of gaps in provision exist in the green sector. According to this information, we need to look specifically at jobs in process, plant and machine operations as well as skilled trades occupations. I ask the Minister to outline how she is currently monitoring these clear gaps in provision.

Education needs to be considered as well. The Minister should also be looking at what training and qualifications are necessary to fill the evident gaps. A joined-up approach is clearly needed, and that is why the Ulster Unionist Party wanted to establish a Department of the economy as soon as possible in line with the recommendations of the independent review of economic policy to tie in the functions of DETI and DEL.

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

The motion specifically mentions the security of supply of renewable energy. That leads on to considering the likelihood of meeting our renewable energy targets. The current target is to provide 40% of electricity demand from renewable sources by 2020, but we all know that that is very unlikely to happen.

The 2011-15 Programme for Government also includes encouraging the achievement of 20% of electricity from renewable sources and 4% of renewable heat by 2015. It is essential that we continue to strive to meet these targets as far as possible. I am sure that the Minister will update us on that today.

Mr Lunn: Not for the first time, I find myself speaking on a Committee motion even though I am not on the relevant Committee.

Mr A Maginness: You are very versatile.

Mr Lunn: Aye, I know. Be that as it may, the motion speaks for itself, and I have no doubt that it will have overwhelming support. I will speak briefly on the economic potential, after which I will put on record some Alliance Party proposals on the wider context.

The motion refers to government's contribution to creating sustainable jobs, but government should recognise the potential for others to create jobs. Governments do not create sustainable jobs but they can create the conditions for others to do so.

We have been moderately successful in this sector in Northern Ireland. There are over 30,000 jobs in the low carbon and environmental sector, which represents a marginally larger total proportionately than in the rest of the UK. That total is growing, despite the prevailing financial conditions. I appreciate that estimates are only that, but even at the lower end of the spectrum, it is possible to see that number doubling over the next decade.

I agree with much of the findings of what I believe was the previous Committee's inquiry into barriers to the development of renewable energy production when it comes to the current lack of targets, which Mrs Overend mentioned. I do not want to set everything up as a tick-box exercise, but we need some means of measuring success or otherwise as we go forward.

I am also amazed at the wide range of agencies that are involved. You have to wonder whether these could be brought together in some way, but whatever the outcome of all that, the key is to have targets for jobs; that is the number one priority. There is, of course, a wider context, particularly with regard to the benefit to consumers. I note that almost £7 million overall is now available each year for home insulation, which is a good start.

The Alliance Party has proposed a renewable energy support Bill. We would include in that the introduction of renewable heat incentives, provision for permitted development for domestic and non-domestic renewable installations and the creation of a framework for the installation of smart meters in every home for microgeneration, which, I understand, would cost roughly £30 million over five years with a potential return of more than that annually. We also support the introduction of a framework for the development of geothermal energy.

We would also like to look at a programme of low-interest loans to the agrifood industry to produce and market environmentally friendly food products. That seems popular at the present time.

4.00 pm

We should not underestimate our green image as a useful marketing tool when it comes to promoting Northern Ireland as a green economy hub. However, we have to back that up with a range of environmental initiatives, not just the direct work on renewable energy. We need to be more environmentally friendly in both our economic and health interests. Initiatives such as the rapid transit scheme, which looks as if it will finally go ahead, will be a welcome development. The creation of additional woodland would also be welcome, as we are sadly lacking in that. That would go along way towards assisting moves towards more renewable energy provision.

This is not a criticism of the Minister — in fact, Mr McGlone complimented her when proposing the motion — but this is the sixth time in three years that we have discussed something along these lines in the House. We have had debates on the warm homes scheme in January 2010, the strategic energy framework in November 2010, the green new deal in October 2010, the green economy in September 2012 and the energy strategy in November 2012. Perhaps, in her reply, the Minister could point to some positive outcomes from all those debates. Mr Wells made the same point in the health debate earlier; namely that we talk about and around these things, but it is sometimes hard. Everybody agrees, but there does not seem to be a positive way forward. I look forward to hearing from the Minister in due course.

Mr Moutray: I rise as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment to speak in support of the Committee's motion. The motion, which I hope will gain widespread support across the House, considers several potential benefits that would flow from the further growth of the sustainable energy sector. Sustainable energy has been defined as energy that has minimal negative impacts on human health and healthy functioning of ecological systems and that can be supplied continuously to future generations. That is a technical definition, but it emphasises the importance of sustainable energy.

The public debate on energy has taken centre stage in recent years. Our dependence on oil and gas is simply not sustainable. We owe it to generations yet to come to make sure that we grasp the nettle, develop alternative energy resources and set clear strategies, objectives and targets. Therefore, today's debate is important as it encourages us to go the second mile.

The Committee's interest in these matters reflects the Executive's interest and approach. The Executive have the strategic aim of a more sustainable energy system in which energy is used as efficiently as possible, much more of our energy comes from renewable resources and energy efficiency is maximised. The Executive's strategic energy framework looks ahead to 2020 and includes the key goals of building competitive markets, ensuring security of supply, enhancing sustainability and developing our energy infrastructure.

In the limited time that I have, I want to address one of the key areas outlined in the motion: the creation of high-value jobs. As our traditional manufacturing base continues to decline and unemployment, especially among our young people, continues to blight our society, it is vital that we do all that we can to exploit all alternative means of job creation. To do that, we must focus on potential growth areas, of which the renewable energy sector is a prime example. Various investigations into the job creation potential of the sustainable energy industry have confirmed, with some variations depending on the criteria applied, that a significant number of people could find meaningful and secure employment in this field over the next decade. I think, for example, of the opportunities presented by developments in marine energy, including wave, tidal and offshore wind. If we are to avail ourselves of such opportunities, at least two things must happen: Northern Ireland companies must exploit the opportunities arising from growth in the sector in the United Kingdom and Europe, and we must ensure that we have a strong skills base. Indeed, those things are two sides of one coin. With our manufacturing heritage and mindset, we could and should lead the way.

It is important that DETI, which takes the lead on energy issues, continue to work as closely as possible with other Departments. I know that that is already happening through the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group, which is chaired by my colleague Arlene Foster. I pay tribute to the Minister, who has shown commendable vision and determination in the development of sustainable energy, to the extent that Northern Ireland is setting an example for others to follow. A key Department represented on the interdepartmental group is the Department for Employment and Learning.

The need for a joined-up approach between educational qualifications, skill development and job creation has been mentioned by others in recent debates in the House, and I want to re-emphasise the point. Relevant courses of study, such as STEM subjects, and academic research and development can all contribute towards a skill base that will supply the industry with suitable employees, who will be able to avail themselves of high-value, well-paid and secure work. We need also to ensure that our IT institutions provide us with those who have the required skills in project management and leadership. Success in those areas will, in turn, encourage further growth in the sustainable energy sector. That can only be good for business and for our communities.

Mr Frew: I support the motion. This is a very important motion to the Chamber, and it is on a subject that we have talked about on countless occasions, as has already been said. Nonetheless, it is a very important issue and one that we have to keep our focus on.

I have heard comments commending the Minister on the work that she has done in this regard. I echo those sentiments and congratulate her on that work. That work is evident when you look at the work being done in the tidal sector of renewable energy. It gives me great pleasure to see that even off the shores of my constituency, North Antrim, there are ventures being put in place for tidal renewable energy. I will meet Tidal Ventures on Friday 15 March to discuss that very issue and see how we can add to an already flourishing renewable energy market.

That brings me to my point: if one message gets out of the House tonight, it should be that we cannot do this on wind alone, and we cannot survive on renewables alone. If you ask businesses, they will tell you that security of supply and cheap energy are the most important things to them. I am not yet convinced that renewable energy on its own will bring any price dividend to our businesses and industry. There has to be a mix, and there have to be choices for our

industry. That is the most important thing that should come out of the debate. Of course, we must progress renewable energy; of course, we must progress wind energy, where it is best placed; and, of course, we must progress tidal energy and offshore wind where we can. It is great that there will be offshore renewable wind farms that produce as much energy and electricity as some of our smaller generators. That is very important, and it is good that we will work on, support and enhance that industry. However, government cannot create these jobs; we can only set the standard and set the arena so that companies move into the space. So it is very good that we push on.

Alongside renewable energy — wind, tidal, anaerobic digestion and every other sort — we must sustain the choice for consumers and industry. That means supporting them when they choose the gas route or remain with oil. That is important to our businesses. The Minister is due to meet representatives from Michelin, which is in my constituency. Michelin is very reliant on cheaper energy prices. It is a global company that used to be top of the league of the most costly plants in the world. No company or plant would ever want to be top of that league. I am grateful that, in the past few years, it has been able to reduce its energy costs so that it is no longer top of that league. That gives confidence to its workforce and to North Antrim, and I commend the company for what it is doing. In the past month, it has installed two wind turbines to help it to reduce its energy costs. However, it still relies on oil and electricity.

We need to get smarter with our grid and make sure that it works, but we also need interconnection. It really annoys me that parties in the House — I mean Sinn Féin — do not support the North/South interconnector and the ways in which they want it to be installed. It is vital to the economy and business in Northern Ireland to help the security of supply and to keep prices down. Where the security of supply is concerned, I also worry about our ageing generators and our problems with the Moyle interconnector.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Frew: So, it is vital that we get North/South interconnection as quickly as possible to help our industry.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the motion and the debate. There are recurrent themes in this motion and in the debates that have taken place in the House about the energy sector and renewable energy in particular. We have to give credit to the Minister for her work in the field. We also have to give credit to the ETI Committee. Even though it is under new Chairmanship, it is still the best Committee in the House. It works away for the common good and works to persuade the Executive to take on the challenge of developing the renewable energy sector.

I think that, although we should support the Minister's good work, there is still a lack of collective Executive commitment to the development of the sector. I agree with Mr Lunn that government cannot create jobs, but government can create the conditions in which jobs can be created and the economy stimulated. That is what we need to do. As legislators, we should put pressure on the Executive, because we know that the jobs potential in this area is significant. The Carbon Trust has spoken about between 8,000 and 33,000 jobs by 2020, which is a substantial addition to the number of jobs in Northern Ireland. The DEL report on skills refers to almost 6,000 jobs that will be required by 2015. We are not talking about unskilled jobs; those are skilled jobs that will have a high value, will pay people well and will create further job opportunities in the sector.

As I have said before, we are uniquely blessed here with wind, sea and grass. We can grow grass and vegetation and produce the means for renewable energy. We have the sea and the tremendous power of the marine. We also have the tremendous power of wind. As Mr Frew said, we should not be overly dependent on wind. Wind is only one source, and it has its deficiencies as well because it is not constant. Nonetheless, we should be developing as much as we can in that direction.

4.15 pm

As Mr Frew also said, to develop that aspect of renewable energy, we have to have the North/South interconnector. If we do not have it, you can forget about renewable energy in Northern Ireland, because we have to be able to transfer electricity from one part of this island to the other. If we do not have the interconnector, we cannot do that. We can argue as long as we like about the track of that interconnector and the route that it takes, but we have to have a solid commitment to that interconnector; otherwise, we will imperil the renewable energy sector in Northern Ireland. The regional colleges have an important role to play in developing skills and giving our young people opportunities. I appeal to government to get its act together —

Mr McGlone: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Mr McGlone: I am wearing another hat as the chair of the all-party working group on construction. Will the Member accept that the huge pool of skills that we have at the moment could, tomorrow morning, with additional investment through the likes of green new deal, be put to use immediately to help create jobs and protect our environment? As well as that, installation schemes could protect those who are vulnerable to cold-related illness and fuel poverty, many of whom are older people.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member very much, and I wish him well in his election campaign. *[Laughter.]* Mid Ulster is a suitable place for the green new deal, and I am sure that, from the Benches in Westminster, he will be even more resourceful and even more forceful in putting forward the green new deal. I wish him well, and I know that he will continue to advocate when he is elected on 8 March —

Mr McGlone: On 7 March.

Mr A Maginness: On 7 March —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we get back to the motion, please?

Mr A Maginness: Right. I know that he will continue to advocate —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr A Maginness: — renewable energy.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. At a time when unemployment rates continue

to cause concern, it is imperative that the Executive capitalise on every opportunity to enhance job creation and develop further our economy.

Renewable energy is by far one of Northern Ireland's biggest economic opportunities. Recent figures from the Northern Ireland Renewable Industry Group (NIRIG) estimate that approximately £1 billion will need to be invested if DETI's 2020 renewable energy targets of generating 40% of energy from renewables are to be met. I am not aware of any other industry in Northern Ireland that can talk about that level of investment. However, if we are to secure major investment in a sustainable energy sector and the job creation and economic advantages that come from it, the Executive must address a number of issues. Given the initial financial outlay required for the majority of renewable energy projects, DETI must ensure that the incentives offered remain at a level that will continue to make renewable energy schemes financially viable and attractive for would-be investors. Long-term stability around policies and avoiding regular reviews of the level of incentives offered will strengthen investor confidence and encourage investments in the types of scheme required to reach the 2020 targets, such as small-scale single wind turbines.

DETI can also play a role in encouraging high standards in our sustainable energy sector. The failed project at the Woodbrook eco-village in Lisburn, where the biomass heating was deemed not fit for purpose, shows that it is crucial that viable and effective systems are put in place. A gas installation had to be put in in that development to meet the project's heating requirements.

Planning outcomes for renewable energy applications must reflect the encouraging nature of the overarching policies of the DOE and have DETI's 2020 targets in mind. On that basis, the recognised benefits of renewable energy development must be given significant weight when decisions on such applications are made. It is important to note that planning decisions must not be influenced by the number of applications that are received because that is not a true reflection of the number of projects that are actually developed.

Even with long-term, stable policies, incentives from DETI and planning decisions that reflect the promotive policies of DOE, achieving growth in the sustainable energy sector raises other significant challenges. Perhaps the most significant of those challenges is the electricity infrastructure and its inability to harness the levels of generation needed to meet upcoming targets. To help to create sustainable, high-value jobs in the renewable energy sector, develop the green economy and enhance security of supply, it is vital that the Executive do all in their power to ensure that the proposed North/South electricity interconnector is progressed as soon as possible. The recently launched renewable heat incentive scheme is a welcome development for non-domestic properties, and I look forward to the extension of that to the domestic market in the near future.

Not only is a strong, indigenous and sustainable energy sector vital to the economy, job creation and security of supply, but it is in the best interests of the consumer. Supporting further growth in the sustainable energy sector will mean that Northern Ireland is much less reliant on the importation of fossil fuels, leaving us much less exposed to volatile international prices. That is good news for consumers, who, in many cases, are already crippled by rising energy prices. In my continuing support for the sustainable energy sector and the benefits that come from it, I support the motion.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the debate and the general support for renewable and sustainable energy that we have heard around the Chamber. In some cases, it has been hard-won, and, in some cases, it has been entirely surprising to hear the positive comments. That said, I welcome them.

I will not rehearse too many of the figures, but I will highlight a few. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills estimates that, in Northern Ireland, just over 31,000 jobs exist in the low-carbon and environmental sector. If we break that down, we see that that probably equates to around 25,000 jobs in the sustainable energy sector itself. That sector has continued to grow despite the recession. It has bucked the trend and has continued to provide increased employment across Northern Ireland. Indeed, it has brought clean, green energy to this part of the world.

There has been a significant number of new start-up businesses, and there are a number of small and medium-sized enterprises in the sector. Renewable and sustainable energy is also helping to maintain some of our big, key players, and it is worth noting that 75% of Harland and Wolff's contracts are now in the offshore renewables base. The Carbon Trust estimates that up to a further 33,000 jobs can be created by 2020 if we meet our 40% renewable electricity target. The report that the Assembly Research and Information Service produced for the Committee has been mentioned in the debate. I am keen that we focus not only on meeting the 40% target but on maximising job creation for Northern Ireland. Of course I want to see renewable and sustainable energy in Northern Ireland, but I also want to see us maximise the job potential for our citizens instead of importing wind turbines and seeing huge foreign companies coming in. Although I welcome clean, green energy, I want to see the local economy benefiting as much as possible from a move towards sustainable energy.

Although I welcome the success that we have seen to date, I have some concerns. The renewable heat incentive in Northern Ireland is less generous than its equivalent in GB, and, indeed, having spoken to some of the players in Northern Ireland, I know that they see GB and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland, as more attractive markets for their businesses. That concerns me because, as I say, we want to retain those businesses and grow our economy, not lose them to other parts of these islands.

We put £25 million towards the renewable heat incentive, which I welcome, but it is worth noting that that money came from the Treasury specifically for a renewable heat incentive. DETI and the Minister have not chosen to top that up with further moneys, which is why we see the lower incentive rates. It has been said that we want more people to avail themselves of renewable energy to spread the money further and wider, but, if we topped that up, perhaps we could produce better incentives. Another factor that has been pointed out is that we are trying to incentivise people off oil, not gas, but the fact that GB is seeking to incentivise people off gas suggests that, in the long-term direction of travel, renewable energy and heat is where we want to go. That is why I ask why we are committing £32·5 million to the extension of the gas network to the west.

Even with the optimistic outlook that we are potentially connecting 30,000 homes, that is around £1,000 per home. I would ask whether that is the best use for public money, given that further down the line we may well be seeking to incentivise those people back off gas and onto renewables.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will.

Mr Frew: Does the Member agree that, for any rationale for extending a gas pipeline, it is not necessarily households that you should look at with regard to that equation? It is about businesses, and giving businesses the opportunity to choose their source of energy. That is the way that you will reduce bills for companies. It should not be about households. The equation should be about businesses and what businesses can connect to the gas pipeline.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: I accept the Member's point to an extent, but the question has to be whether it is a good use of public money. If, further down the line, businesses are going to be seeking to invest in renewable heat instead, it may not be a good choice for business either. In his contribution, the Member mentioned choice. He said that we should not have a single supply and we needed to have a mix and to have choice. I agree with him, and there is plenty of mix and choice in offshore wind, onshore wind, tidal, wave, biomass, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, solar photovoltaic (PV) and solar thermal. There is plenty of diversity in the renewable sector, and that is where we need to head.

One final concern that I will mention, which has been referred to, is the failure of Departments to start shifting departmental buildings onto renewable heat. There have been some moves within DFP and DARD in particular, but, when I ask questions of other Departments, they say that they are not considering it, have not considered it and have not assessed it. When you look at DARD, you find that that Minister sees the potential, not just for departmental savings —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Agnew: — but indeed for the agriculture industry if we incentivise the use of biomass.

I welcome today's debate. We are right to congratulate ourselves where we do well, but I certainly think that we can do more. I hope that we will.

Mr B McCrea: Mr Maginness said that this was the best Committee in the Assembly. I have not had the benefit of hearing its deliberations, but there are a few questions that I would like some clarity on. Perhaps the Minister or the Chair will be able to deal with them.

The first thing is, when people call for somewhere between 7,000 and 33,000 jobs, I would like to know specifically what those jobs are in. We seem to have a range of issues: onshore wind, offshore wind, biomass, fracking, photovoltaic, the performance, the grid or whatever. Presumably, you do not need the same skills to do all of those. I would like someone to explain to me exactly what is our strategic energy policy. I heard Mr Dunne say that DETI's target was 40% of electricity by 2020. Is that electricity production or electricity consumption?

When people tell us that there are no alternatives, I wonder about the cost of putting in interconnectors that may link us to nuclear power in Cumbria or, for other issues, about how we look at the cost of investment. That is the real issue, and it was actually brought up by Mr Agnew: is this an appropriate use of public money?

Offshore wind farms are not being built. If you look at the Committee that I am on, you will see that a number of large construction firms that manufacture wind turbines are closing down in Denmark and elsewhere because the markets are not being fulfilled.

4.30 pm

When people talk about the cost-effectiveness of those interventions, I wonder which is more cost-effective. Is it offshore wind or is it gas-powered generators? What is more important to the consumer? Is it that the lights are always on, the price that we pay, or sustainability?

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr Frew also raised the point about whether renewable or sustainable energy will have a positive impact on price. It is worth noting that, although it is hard to predict how prices will go, we know that gas prices are rising and will continue to rise. The one thing that you get with renewable energy is sustainable prices, because, with regard to solar and wind, those fuel sources are free.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr B McCrea: Thank you. Some commentators believe that the United Kingdom's commitment to giving financial support to renewables on offshore wind will cost £160 billion over the lifetime that they are forecasting. You have to say to yourself that, if other countries do not do that and if they invest in nuclear or gas, which are cheaper, or other things, we are at a competitive advantage. All I am saying is that those things need to be looked at so that we can work out what skills we should be investing in.

People are talking about 7,000 jobs. There is a real need to invest in the grid. I am sure that the Minister will agree that we have had underinvestment in the grid and in our assets, and we now need more power transmission engineers. I also think that we need to look at the interconnectors. The question, of course, is this: who is going to pay for the interconnectors? Will it be the consumer or the heavy users — I find it a little bit strange that it is our heavy users who are paying disproportionately more of our electricity bill — or should it be the Government as some form of sovereign investment? Those issues need to be decided before you can decide what jobs you need to invest in.

Mr Agnew mentioned the significance of Harland and Wolff and about how much of its output was now in renewable energies. I had the opportunity to talk to Harland and Wolff, and it said that, unfortunately, because it was not part of the winning consortium — DONG Energy won the offshore bid — it is sitting with no work for its renewable section. It is actually going back to oil and gas in the North Sea. There is an issue about whether we are really creating jobs that we will get.

I also talked to AirGrid and the folks who are trying to manage the amount of wind that we bring into the whole of the Irish grid, and that includes Ireland and Northern Ireland, and they tell me that we are at 40% at the moment on peak, but that they would like to take it to 75%. That

is a tremendous engineering feat, but it leads to certain problems about curtailment. What happens when the wind blows too strongly, and what happens when we cannot balance the load of energy that we make in the middle of the night when we do not have the demand? Those are strategic issues that I hope the Minister will be able to address.

I was also interested to learn that many of the offshore wind farms off the Dublin coast will not now be built, because the Irish Government says that they are already meeting their obligations with onshore wind farms — you will notice that the United Kingdom has just signed an agreement on that — and that it is simply too expensive to invest in offshore.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr B McCrea: All of those issues come forward. However, I would like to see some form of proper economic strategic framework for energy, and if we had that —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry; I am just finished. I do not have time. We need a proper framework to do that, and then you can decide on the jobs and skills that you want. We must not —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr B McCrea: — put the cart before the horse.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I value the interest shown by Members in the debate. It had been indicated that we have debated sustainable energy on quite a number of occasions, and what are the benefits of it? The benefits are that you get to spend the afternoon with me in the Chamber debating sustainable energy issues and talking about the real sustainable issues.

In the most recent debate that we had about this issue, someone raised the issue about what falls under sustainability in relation to energy. Indeed, the previous Member who spoke mentioned nuclear, gas and renewables. Those are the three elements that make up sustainable energy, and we need to remember that. I know that we have talked mostly about renewables. If Mr Agnew is wondering where I got that definition from, it is a Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) definition.

Mr Agnew: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Agnew: You mentioned that it was a DECC definition. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills includes nuclear when it lists its renewable energy and low carbon sources, but it does not include gas.

Mrs Foster: We are talking about energy issues today, so I will take the Department of Energy and Climate Change's definition. Let us look at those issues. We have talked a lot about renewables today, and I think that it is right that we do that. We have an increasing amount of renewables in our energy mix, and I very much welcome that. It gives us the opportunity to insulate against future cost increases of wholesale oil and gas prices, but we also need to look to longer term benefits in relation to security of supply and economic growth.

Basil McCrea asked me about having a strategic vision in relation to energy. I know that he is not a member of the ETI Committee, but that is what the strategic energy framework (SEF) is. That is why we have it there. That sets the whole framework for energy policy up to 2020. I will talk about what will happen beyond that, because Mr McGlone raised the point about what we are doing up to 2050.

Mr B McCrea: I thank the Minister for giving way. For clarity, do we remain committed to 40% of electricity being produced from renewable sources by 2020?

Mrs Foster: Absolutely. I will talk about that later, because Mrs Overend talked about the fact that we would not reach that by 2020. I am delighted to see the progress that has been achieved with our electricity generation. In fact, we have gone past our interim targets in relation to that.

The strategic energy framework is there to support the development of a range of renewable technologies, and Members rightly make the point that we do not create the jobs; we just set the context for those jobs. That is what we have been trying to do through our work on the strategic energy framework and through Invest Northern Ireland and the many interventions that are taking place at present.

The 40% renewable energy target by 2020 is the cornerstone of our strategy. It is there to help us to increase energy security and is a significant step towards decarbonisation of the power sector. Growth in the sustainable energy sector, fuelled by increasing use of renewables, brings many benefits. Renewables can be a key player in creating investment, exports and jobs, which Northern Ireland's economy needs. For example, Invest Northern Ireland has indicated that the low-carbon energy and environmental goods and services sector presently delivers £3·7 billion to the Northern Ireland economy, employing 31,000 people in 1,500 companies. The sector is a net exporter of goods and services and is anticipated to continue to grow at almost 5% each year for the next 10 years.

We have identified wind, marine, bioenergy and resource efficiency sectors as having the highest potential to deliver significant economic and employment benefits to Northern Ireland through the various supply chain opportunities, research and development and inward investment.

I am disappointed with Mr Agnew's point that it is only local that we want to see investing here. Some of the best investments that have been made here in the renewables sector have been from foreign direct investment, and I will continue to push that in the market because I believe that we can be a real hub for that sector internationally. That is what I want to see being achieved. So, I ask him to raise his aspirations in respect of renewable energy.

We need to facilitate the onshore renewable sector. The Department has developed an onshore renewable electricity action plan, the final version of which I hope will be with the Executive in the next few months. That aims to maximise the amount of renewable electricity generated from onshore renewable sources and is underpinned by the rationale that it is for the market to bring forward the most cost-effective mix of renewable technology.

In 2011, wind energy contributed £620 million to the local economy. It is expected to grow by 8% this year and to rise

to 9% in 2014 and maintain that level of activity through to 2020.

The established bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland is a net exporter of goods and services, with growth and sales estimated to rise by 20% from 2011-12 levels to £240 million in 2014-15. Importantly for Northern Ireland, offshore wind licensed projects in the Irish Sea region are valued at £20 billion and, if realised, have the potential to provide one of the largest single business opportunities for this region in a generation.

Our offshore renewable energy strategic action plan was agreed by the Executive in March 2012 and provided the strategic framework within which the Crown Estate announced the results of the first Northern Ireland offshore leasing round in October. As the House is aware, development rights were awarded to First Flight Wind for offshore wind off the south Down coast. In the marine energy sector, tidal energy off the north Antrim coast went to a consortium with international and local connections, which has raised our profile internationally, and I very much welcome that.

The potential for business development in the renewable energy sector is great. Invest NI has developed a strong sector team and employed a dedicated business development director for renewables in Europe to maximise supply chain and foreign direct investment opportunities. Many successes have been delivered, including the South West College, B9 Energy and Fast Technologies working together to develop energy storage solutions to militate against curtailment on the electricity grid, which was mentioned on a number of occasions; Harland and Wolff's offshore developments in transformer substations; and the investment in the sector by Belfast Harbour for the provision of the DONG Energy offshore logistics terminal, which will deliver substantial benefits to the wider economy. In fact, Invest Northern Ireland is matching supply chain opportunities for over 60 work packages associated with the terminal and associated offshore contracts, which is very much to be welcomed.

I previously informed Members that I asked MATRIX to conduct a study of emerging market opportunities for Northern Ireland in the sustainable energy sector. That study, which was led by a team of business leaders and key academics from across the sector, is due for completion shortly. Once I have given the final report due consideration, I will work with the Executive, the economic subcommittee and other relevant stakeholders to take its recommendations forward as appropriate.

There is also much activity in research and development, as Ms McLaughlin mentioned. Support for a centre for advanced sustainable energy, based at Queen's University, is being developed by Northern Ireland's research institutions and businesses in the renewable energy sector. Several Northern Ireland companies continue to be involved in the development, manufacture, assembly or deployment of marine energy devices.

Implementing electricity market reform with the rest of the United Kingdom will be a positive opportunity for Northern Ireland to further reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels, cut carbon emissions and give the renewables industry the confidence to invest in renewable electricity generation in Northern Ireland.

Having highlighted the benefits of renewables, I stress that the key thing that we need to do to prepare for the future is to ensure that we use as little energy as possible — energy efficiency. That is why I am introducing, in a new Energy Bill, a proposal for an energy efficiency obligation that could ensure a step change in energy efficiency in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Energy Bill proposals would increase the importance of sustainability in the hierarchy of duties and obligations for the Utility Regulator and the Department. Where appropriate, the deployment of renewable and energy efficient technologies are embraced within those activities.

I talked about the opportunities in the renewable energy sector, but we can also demonstrate that Northern Ireland continues to excel in another important sector of resource efficiency. It is important that Northern Ireland companies not only exploit opportunities in the sustainable energy sector but look at how they can utilise resource efficiency and on-site renewable generation to increase their competitive position.

We continue to deliver the sustainable productivity programme's full range of activities. These include an interest-free energy efficiency loan scheme, a capital grant scheme for water- and/or materials-saving projects, industrial symbiosis services, free audits to identify resource efficiency projects, free technical consultancy to help businesses to take resource efficiency projects forward and a range of other events and activities.

4.45 pm

I will look quickly at incentives. The House will be aware that the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) has been very successful in encouraging greater levels of renewable electricity generation. Companies such as Brett Martin, Balcas, and Ballyrashane Creamery have all installed renewable electricity generation technologies to offset their energy costs.

At a domestic level, we are starting to see increased interest by homeowners in the installation of solar photovoltaic panels. When the NIRO was introduced in 2005, renewables accounted for just 3% of total electricity generation. The average up to the end of December 2012 was just under 14%, which means that we have already exceeded our 2012 target of 12% by some margin. I think that it was Ms McLaughlin who said that we only have the one target of 40% by 2020 in the SEF. That is right, but in the Programme for Government we had a target of 12% by 2012. We have exceeded that, and are now at 14%. That is a sure sign that our renewable energy policy is on the right track. I very much welcome that.

I was rather amused when Mr Lunn said that the Alliance Party policy was to get a renewable heat incentive. Well, I can tell him today that that is granted, because, of course, we have a renewable heat incentive. We have been developing a more diverse, sustainable and secure heating market. That is one of the Department's priorities. Northern Ireland is overly dependent on home heating oil, which leaves consumers vulnerable to price fluctuations beyond our control and has a direct impact on the levels of fuel poverty. To —

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I will indeed.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for the effort that she has made in making sure that we have a better energy mix. How concerned is the Minister or the Department about protest meetings that are now taking place regarding wind farms? It is something that is beginning to become a concern in west Tyrone. I think that fears are being exaggerated, particularly in relation to health.

Mrs Foster: More than anybody else, I recognise the right of communities to come together and ask questions; that is absolutely the right thing to do. I would encourage those companies who want to put in installations, of whatever nature, to engage at the earliest opportunity with the community so that if there are questions to be asked about health or other issues, they are answered as quickly as possible. The worst way to do it is to ignore the local community and think that you can just talk to them at the end of the planning procedures; that is not the way to engage with communities. I have said that to many installers, whether of wind farms, anaerobic digesters or whatever. Early discussions are key.

For the Northern Ireland heat market to become secure and more competitive, it is vital that alternative fuel sources such as renewable heat technologies and natural gas be developed and encouraged. The strategic energy framework therefore includes a target for Northern Ireland to achieve 10% renewable heat by 2020. To reach that ambitious and stretching target, it is essential that we have support mechanisms in place.

Last November, I was pleased to launch the Northern Ireland renewable heat incentive (RHI). It is a groundbreaking scheme and will provide businesses, community groups, schools, churches and other organisations with ongoing financial support when switching to renewable heat.

In addition, the development of that sector will provide opportunities for local firms involved in the area. It is expected that the incentive could support the installation of over 20,000 technologies by 2020, as well as securing our target for renewable heat. The RHI is available for non-domestic customers in the first instance, with a view to extending it to the domestic market in due course. In the meantime, householders can avail themselves of grant support from my Department, via the renewable heat premium payment scheme, which I launched in 2012.

To go to Mr Agnew's point on why we did not top up the renewable heat incentives —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is almost up.

Mrs Foster: I have taken a few interruptions.

The renewable heat incentives are not set because we have only £25 million; they are set because we looked at it from an economic perspective and we looked at the counterfactual, which, of course, is oil and not gas. It is quite wrong, Mr Deputy Speaker, for a Member to try to mislead the House by saying that we are setting it because we have only £25 million and are not looking at a way of topping it up.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mrs Foster: We are looking at it from an economic perspective. However, I know that that is something that is quite alien to Mr Agnew.

Mr Flanagan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her response. I am quite glad to be able to go after the Minister. I do not mean "go after" the Minister — I mean that I am glad to speak following the Minister. That is because it means that I cannot be the recipient of some of the comments that the Minister makes sometimes. I thought that, until her final 10 seconds or so, she was going really well.

I welcome the opportunity to make a winding-up speech on this debate, and I thank the Committee for supporting the motion. I am thankful that energy is a devolved matter and that we are not reliant on DECC to provide policy definitions for us. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment recognises that we are in a prime position to exploit the opportunities that renewable energy development presents across these islands and in the wider European context.

As many Members indicated, it is not the sole responsibility of one Department or one Minister to drive this forward. Many other Departments have various responsibilities regarding the effective roll-out of renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities, both of which can contribute to the green economy. Many Members have taken the opportunity to commend the Minister. I also commend her for the efforts that she has made in trying to grow this one aspect of our economy as part of her role as the economy Minister and the energy Minister. However, it is clear that there is a great need for other Departments to put renewable energy high on their agenda, and, as the chair of the SEIDWG and as a member of the Executive, the Minister has a key role to play in making that happen.

From a personal point of view, I think that the failure to introduce a radical retrofitting scheme that is based on the proposals that the green new deal group put forward is, and has been, disappointing. Such a scheme would have brought multiple benefits through reduced energy costs, reduced carbon emissions, the tackling of fuel poverty and the creation of thousands of jobs in the construction sector.

The boiler replacement scheme, which was brought forward as an alternative, is a welcome scheme. However, I will return to this question: why could the boiler replacement scheme not have been implemented as part of a wider energy efficiency/retrofitting loan scheme? It could have been done as part of a loan scheme. Are we expected to believe that those who are in the greatest deprivation, which means those who are living with the worst aspects of fuel poverty, can afford to shell out £1,000 to get a new boiler installed, even though there are considerable long-term benefits to having a fully efficient boiler?

The fact that those in gas areas cannot avail themselves of any kind of a grant to switch to renewables reinforces the point that I have often made about the level of protection that is afforded to the gas industry here. We have had gas since 1996. It is a very well-established industry, and it is very attractive for potential investors. It is my view that that protection does not need to be there any more. As Paul Frew identified, we need to move to a situation where there is choice. However, that choice does not exist for those who are living in gas-enabled areas.

The launch of the renewable heat incentive is a very welcome move. However, Mr Agnew mentioned the facts that only £25 million was invested in it, that all that was provided directly by the British Government and that the scheme is, in fact, being administered by the British regulator. So, the £25 million that the Executive put forward came from the British Government, albeit with tweaked incentives, given the high proportion of our households that pay more for oil. However, the fact that that £25 million has been dwarfed by the £32·5 million incentivisation that the Executive have provided for the gas pipeline has raised some concerns, particularly among those who are employed in the green economy sector, about the Executive's seriousness about the renewable energy sector. I am glad to hear positive comments from the Minister towards that sector, and I am glad that initiatives to support that industry are still being taken forward.

I genuinely hope that the RHI scheme is a huge success and that, in the future, its budget can be further increased.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I take his point regarding gas. However, does the Member realise that Michelin, for example, did not remove itself from the top of a league table of the most costly plants because of the two turbines that it has installed at the back of its yard; it has removed itself from that position because it has connected to gas. That is the most important thing here. Businesses in the west deserve gas as much as businesses anywhere else. Sinn Féin should not be denying them, or trying to deny them, that choice.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for his intervention. I am glad that he mentioned Michelin again. It is an issue that he raises all the time. A resource that also exists in north Antrim and is not being tapped into but is very accessible for both businesses and households is geothermal energy. It needs to be given serious consideration. It is not included as part of the renewable heat incentive. The potential of geothermal energy would be very attractive for many businesses in the Member's constituency. I encourage the Minister to think seriously about how it will be incentivised and what changes need to be made to allow that industry to grow here.

To return to the Member's comments about the gas network, I can say that most of the information provided to the Committee about it concerns domestic households: the impact that it would have on fuel poverty; the number of households that would benefit, which is potentially 40,000; and if 70% signed up, how much it would cost. Very few references were actually made to businesses. That is why, as Committee members, we talk about households.

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will in a wee minute. We have been told that it is there to benefit domestic customers. Obviously, there is a clear benefit for very intensive manufacturing businesses. There is no doubt about that. If that is why the gas network is being expanded, that is the reason on which it needs to be sold. It should not be sold on the potential savings for domestic customers, only for people to turn around and say that it is not about domestic customers.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for giving way. His party supports the gas network to the west, by the way, and it did so at the Executive. I am very pleased that it did so, because it recognised that the issue is not just about domestic customers but businesses. Yes, it is about domestic customers, but it also about businesses. He knows fine well that the load factor that is provided by people such as the Quinn Group in Derrylin has made that an economic decision for the Executive. I am very disappointed that a Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone does not recognise the economic benefit that that will bring to that company. It is quite unbelievable.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for her intervention. I do not need any more information on how much benefit it will have for businesses. That is clear: no one is questioning that. We are talking about domestic customers. Sinn Féin has supported the gas extension. However, there are questions about domestic customers. If it is being done for businesses, sell it for businesses.

Mr Flanagan: Do not come out and say that it is for domestic customers and then tell us not to bring up domestic customers.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: Go ahead, Paul.

Mr Frew: If the Member admits that this is Sinn Féin policy, where does he stand?

Mr Flanagan: What I am articulating is the Sinn Féin policy. My party has supported the roll-out of the gas network because it makes sense for everybody. However, when you say "everybody", that has to include domestic customers and businesses. You cannot send papers to a Committee and say that it will benefit a certain number of domestic customers with very little reference to business and then stand up here and say that it is only about business and that we should not think about domestic customers. The debate is about the positive nature of the renewable energy sector. I want to get back to that.

I want to talk for a moment about the draft heating policy that has recently been produced by the Housing Executive, because, once again, it returns to the choices that Paul Frew brought up. Once again, people who live in a gas-enabled area will not be afforded the choice to move from gas to renewables. If we are going to have that choice, the option has to work both ways.

Very few public buildings actually use renewable heat. This one, of course, continues to use gas. I would like to use this opportunity to encourage the Assembly Commission to assess the potential for renewable heat here. When I table questions to Ministers, I get responses from DFP that state things such as it is still trialling solar panels. In 2013, it is still trialing solar panels.

Recently, I visited the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise in Enniskillen, where there is a very effective biomass boiler. It is supplied with biomass by local farmers. That is having a good impact on the local economy. Last week, there was a good event there at which local companies were able to showcase the renewable products that they offer.

Mr Dunne raised the issue of district heating schemes and how one in his constituency was not very successful. The reason that it was not successful was not because the technology did not work; it was because the houses did not sell owing to the slump in the housing market. Economically, it was proven that it would have worked if all the houses had been sold. We need to go back and look at

the potential for district heating schemes. An eco-village is proposed for Enniskillen. At the centre of that should be a biomass boiler.

I have 30 seconds left, and I am mandated by Sinn Féin to talk about the North/South interconnector at every opportunity. Other Members have raised that issue and how Sinn Féin has opposed it. It is very clear to realise —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

5.00 pm

Mr Flanagan: At the minute, there is no planning policy in the system in the South for a North/South interconnector. The recent expert report notes that it will be slightly more expensive to build it underground, but that does not take into account the additional costs of pylons and overhead power lines. It also does not look at land devaluation and environmental impact assessments.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to encourage and support further growth in the sustainable energy sector to help maximise government's contribution to creating sustainable, high-value jobs in the renewable energy sector, developing the green economy, enhancing security of supply and encouraging consumers to use renewable energy.

Mr Agnew: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to accuse a Member of trying to mislead the House?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I will ensure that the Speaker and his office take a look at that transaction in Hansard and review whether any further action is required.

Adjourned at 5.01 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 19 February 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Budget Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister of Justice to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been tabled, so there is no opportunity to discuss the Budget Bill at this stage. The Bill's Further Consideration Stage is therefore concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Criminal Justice Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I advise Members that a petition of concern was tabled this morning to amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26. Today's proceedings on the Bill will therefore stop after the Question on amendment No 20. The Questions on the remainder of the Bill will be put at the next sitting of the House.

I call the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, to move the Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I am sure that Members will be pleased that Sammy Wilson is not now on his feet. Before introducing the amendments for debate, I will say a few words about the progress of the Bill to date. I thank the Committee for its assistance in getting a relatively short but fairly complex Bill to Consideration Stage within the allotted time.

Mr Speaker: Minister, you just have to move the Bill at this stage.

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, I beg to move amendment No 1.

Mr Speaker: Minister, you just have to move the Bill at this stage.

Moved. — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order of consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are three groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 13 and Nos 35 to 37, which deal with notification requirements for sex offenders and making human trafficking offences triable on indictment only. The second debate will be on amendment Nos 14 to 17 and Nos 38 to 41, which deal with the release on licence of children convicted of a serious offence; enabling the operation of registered intermediary schemes; and the abolition of the offence of scandalising the judiciary. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 18 to 34, which deal with the retention of DNA profiles, fingerprints and photographic material.

Once the debate on each group is completed, any further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Questions on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 13 and Nos 35 to 37. The amendments deal with increasing sex offender notification requirements and ensuring that human trafficking offences are triable on indictment only.

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 1: After clause 1 insert

"Notification requirements: absence from notified residence

1A.—*(1) Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is amended as follows.*

(2) After section 85 insert—

"Notification requirements: absence from notified residence

85A.—(1) This section applies to a relevant offender at any time if the last home address notified by him under section 83(1),84(1) or 85(1) was an address in Northern Ireland such as is mentioned in section 83(7)(a) (sole or main residence).

(2) If the relevant offender intends to be absent from that home address for a period of more than 3 days ("the relevant period"), the relevant offender must, not less than 12 hours before leaving that home address, notify to the police the information set out in subsection (3).

(3) The information is—

(a) the date on which the relevant offender will leave that home address;

(b) such details as the relevant offender holds about—

(i) his travel arrangements during the relevant period;

(ii) his accommodation arrangements during that period;

(iii) his date of return to that home address.

(4) In this section—

"travel arrangements" include, in particular, details of the means of transport to be used and the dates of travel,

"accommodation arrangements" include, in particular, the address of any accommodation at which the relevant offender will spend the night during the relevant period and the nature of that accommodation.

(5) Where—

(a) a relevant offender has given a notification under subsection (2), and

(b) at any time before that mentioned in that subsection, the information notified becomes inaccurate or incomplete,

the relevant offender must give a further notification under subsection (2).

(6) Where a relevant offender—

(a) has notified a date of return to his home address, but

(b) returns to his home address on a date other than that notified,

the relevant offender must notify the date of his actual return to the police within 3 days of his actual return.

(7) Nothing in this section requires an offender to notify any information which falls to be notified in accordance with a requirement imposed by regulations under section 86.

(8) In calculating the relevant period for the purposes of this section there is to be disregarded—

(a) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, an address of the kind mentioned in section 83(5)(g) notified to the police under section 83 or 85;

(b) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, any premises, if his stay at those premises would give rise to a requirement to notify the address of those premises under section 84(1)(c).

(9) This section applies in relation to any relevant period which begins on or after the day after the coming into operation of section (Notification requirements: absence from notified residence) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.".

(3) In section 87(1) and (4) (method of notification) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)".

(4) In section 91 (offences)—

(a) in subsection (1)(a) after "85(1)" insert ", 85A(2) or (6)";

(b) in subsection (1)(b) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)";

(c) in subsection (3) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)"."

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 3, page 2, line 31, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 3: In clause 3, page 2, line 32, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 4: In clause 3, page 2, line 35, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 5: In clause 3, page 3, line 14, leave out "State" and insert "country". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 6: In clause 3, page 3, line 24, leave out

"to the modifications set out below"

and insert

"—

(a) in all cases, to the modifications set out below; and

(b) in a case where the first condition mentioned in subsection (2) is met by reason of a conviction, finding or caution in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe, to the further provisions in section 96AA." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice.]

No 7: In clause 3, page 4, line 18, leave out "State" and insert "country". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 8: In clause 3, page 4, line 24, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 9: In clause 3, page 4, line 25, at end insert

"Convictions, etc. in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe

96AA.—(1) The further provisions referred to in section 96A(5)(b) are as follows.

(2) Where P is charged with an offence under section 91(1)(a), it is a defence for P to prove that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(3) P shall cease to be subject to the notification requirements of this Part by virtue of section 96A if the High Court, on an application made by P in accordance with rules of court, so orders; but the High Court shall not make such an order unless it is satisfied that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(4) A conviction, finding or caution falls within this subsection if the relevant court is satisfied—

(a) that any investigations or proceedings leading to it were conducted in a way which contravened any of the Convention rights which P would have had if those investigations or proceedings had taken place in the United Kingdom; and

(b) that contravention was such that, in the opinion of the court, the conviction, finding or caution cannot safely be relied on for the purposes of meeting the condition in section 96A(2).

(5) In this section—

"the relevant conviction, finding or caution" means the conviction, finding or caution by reason of which P is subject, by virtue of section 96A, to the notification requirements of this Part;

"the relevant court" means—

(a) in a case to which subsection (2) applies, the court before which P is charged;

(b) in a case to which subsection (3) applies, the High Court." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 10: In clause 3, page 4, line 26, leave out from beginning to "section 97" in line 29 and insert

"(3) Omit sections 97 to 101 (notification orders).

(4) Subsection (3) (and the related repeals in Part 1 of Schedule 4) do not affect the validity or effect of any order made under section 97 or 100". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 11: In clause 3, page 4, leave out line 33 and insert "for "98" substitute "96A(6)" ". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 12: In clause 5, page 6, line 2, leave out paragraph (a). — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 13: After clause 6 insert

"Trafficking offences to be triable only on indictment

***6A**.—(1) In section 57(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).*

(2) In section 58(2) of that Act (trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(3) In section 59(2) of that Act (trafficking out of the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(4) In section 4(5) of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 (trafficking people for exploitation) omit paragraph (b).

(5) This section does not apply in relation to an offence committed before this section comes into operation." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 35: In schedule 4, page 24, line 17, at end insert

"PART 1

SEX OFFENDERS

Short Title	*Extent of Repeal*
The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42)	*Sections 97 to 101*
	In section 136(8) "101". "

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 36: In schedule 4, page 24, leave out line 25 and insert

"In section 4(5), paragraph (b) and the word "or" immediately before it.

Section 5(1).

Section 5(13)."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 37: In schedule 4, page 24, line 26, column 2, at beginning insert

"Section 57(2)(a).

Section 58(2)(a).

Section 59(2)(a)."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Ford: The new clause inserted by amendment No 1 will add to the range of information that a convicted sex offender is required to give to the police if they are subject to the notification framework set out in Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. That framework is designed to assist the police to protect the public and prevent crime. The new provision will require sex offenders to notify the police of travel plans within the UK.

We know that sex offenders travel to commit crimes, and, too often, we have seen horrific sexual murders take place in areas that were not the home of the offender. One example was Robert Black's conviction in 2011 for the murder of Jennifer Cardy. The current notification regime addresses that issue in two ways. First, it requires offenders to tell the police in advance if they plan to travel to destinations outside the UK. This aims to make it more difficult for sex offenders to offend abroad by travelling to other jurisdictions where exploitation of children for sexual abuse is all too prevalent. There are many examples of such cases. The law can also prevent an offender from travelling to any country or all countries outside the UK for the purposes of protecting children from serious sexual harm. Secondly, the law requires offenders to tell the police of any address or addresses in the UK where they have stayed for at least seven days within a 12-month period. Thus, police will know the likely or possible whereabouts of an individual if he is not at his main

address. This is all useful information for the police to have to prevent crime and protect the public.

There is one loophole apparent in the provisions that this amendment seeks to address. The police brought this to our attention as the result of a particular case where an offender spent a large amount of time away from his home address but had not registered a second address. Although no offending behaviour was identified in that case, it became clear that those who, for example, travel with a touring caravan or stay at bed and breakfast accommodation for no longer than six nights at a time can be anywhere in the UK for any length of time without any requirement to tell the police. Since then, my officials have worked with the police and other key stakeholders to address the issue. The emerging proposals were shared with the Justice Committee, and members have been supportive. The resulting amendment before the House today aims to provide a method to plug the identified gap.

The provision will require an offender to notify the police in advance of their intention to travel away from their registered home address for more than three days. That will not be necessary if they are going to stay at another registered address or if they will be required to notify that address under existing law. In other words, if they are simply going to travel from place to place for short periods, they must at least tell police in advance of their plans. Such a requirement can never ensure that the police will know where an offender is all the time. That is an impossibility. Of course, the provision is only as good as the information that the offender can give at the time. However, it will at least allow the police to know that one of the notified offenders is travelling to another part of the UK and, where applicable, to inform the other police service of the likely presence of a known sex offender in that area. It may also allow the police to intervene if an offender plans to go somewhere where, the police believe, the offender may pose a specific risk, such as a theme park, perhaps.

I have consulted the Attorney about this provision. Although cautioning that the measure may draw close to a disproportionate interference, he considered that the proposed restriction on private life is likely to withstand a challenge on article 8 grounds on the basis of the legitimate aim of crime prevention. Our aim is to take effective but proportionate measures to ensure the safety of the public from harm, and I consider this measure to meet that aim.

The second group of amendments — Nos 2 to 11 — are to the sex offender provisions and extend the provision in clause 3 to require offenders with convictions from all other countries, not just those within the European Economic Area (EEA), to notify the police if they are in Northern Ireland. The existing provision is limited to those with convictions from EEA countries. This was a result of concerns expressed to me by the Attorney General, who felt that a wider application would not be compatible with article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, the limited application of the provision did not find support from members of the Executive when I asked for approval to introduce the Bill. I therefore gave a commitment to work with the Attorney and with the Justice Committee during the passage of the Bill to bring forward an amendment to allow for a single, enhanced process for attaching notification. My Department worked with the Attorney's office and brought proposals to the Justice Committee. The amendment provides that a sex offender with a conviction from any country outside the UK will be statutorily bound to tell the police of his presence in Northern Ireland rather than having a court order made, as at present. However, to address the Attorney's article 6 concerns, there will be safeguards for those from countries outwith the Council of Europe. They will be able to apply to the High Court for the removal of any notification requirements on the basis that the conviction from their state of origin was unsound due to human rights abuses. There is also a defence on identical grounds against any charge of failure to comply. The Justice Committee supported the amended proposals, which we consider to be a proportionate method to meet the aim of improving public protection.

I will turn to amendment Nos 12 and 13, which make human trafficking offences triable on indictment only. Amendment No 13 inserts a new clause that amends sections 57, 58 and 59 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and section 4 of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 to remove the existing provision for summary convictions for human trafficking offences. At present, a trial may be directed to either the Magistrates' Court, where the maximum term of imprisonment is six months, or to the Crown Court, where the maximum term of imprisonment is generally 14 years. The proposed new clause will ensure that, from commencement, all future offences of human trafficking, whether for sexual or other forms of exploitation, are triable on indictment in the Crown Court and will attract a maximum sentence of 14 years' imprisonment. A further consequence of the amendment is that sentences for human trafficking offences will automatically be included in the scheduled offences referable to the Court of Appeal by the Director of Public Prosecutions on the grounds that he considers sentences unduly lenient. I am sure that Members will welcome that particular provision.

In the course of the consultation on the Bill, strong views were expressed that sentencing for human trafficking offences should be an effective deterrent to this heinous crime. Those views were echoed by the Justice Committee, which emphasised its desire to see the strongest possible legislation introduced in Northern Ireland on human trafficking. Recent judgements in Northern Ireland have also reinforced the seriousness of human trafficking. In one case, Judge Burgess noted:

> *"Any case involving the trafficking of other human beings is a serious case and will merit a sentence which is proportionate to the offending and is a genuine and real deterrent."*

This, of course, is also in line with the spirit of the EU directive that highlights the gravity of the offence. I believe that the changes provided for in amendment Nos 12 and 13 reflect the seriousness of the offence and will act as an effective deterrent to traffickers. I therefore commend amendment Nos 1 to 13 and Nos 35 to 37 to the House.

10.45 am

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Before addressing the first group of amendments, with your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a few general remarks about the Bill in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee for Justice. Although the

Committee for Justice has agreed the clauses in the Bill as drafted or as drafted with proposed departmental amendments, as I indicated at Second Stage, the reality is that the Bill is considered a necessity rather than one that is particularly welcome. It is fair to say that the only parts of the Bill that had the wholehearted support of the Committee were the provisions introducing new offences to tackle human trafficking and sex offender provisions that will improve public protection arrangements. The Bill has, however, provided an opportunity for the Committee to table an amendment to do away with the archaic offence of scandalising the court. I will say more about that during the debate on the second group of amendments.

Given the importance of the three policy areas covered by the Bill — changes to the law on sex offender notification requirements; the introduction of two new offences aimed at preventing and combating human trafficking and protecting its victims; and the establishment of a new legislative framework for the retention of fingerprints and DNA samples and profiles — the Committee extended the Committee Stage of the Bill by a number of weeks to enable detailed and careful scrutiny of the 10 clauses and the four schedules. The Committee also considered other proposed provisions on unrelated issues that the Department indicated it intended to bring forward at Consideration Stage.

The Committee sought a wide range of views as part of its deliberations on the Bill and requested evidence from interested organisations and individuals, as well as from the Department of Justice. Written responses were received from 27 individuals and organisations, and the Committee took oral evidence from eight organisations. The written and oral evidence raised a number of issues and concerns, particularly in relation to human trafficking and the proposed new fingerprint and DNA retention framework.

I thank the members of the Committee for their contributions to the discussion on and consideration of the Bill at Committee Stage. The detail in the Committee report demonstrates that we scrutinised and considered all aspects of the Bill in a full and thorough manner. I also thank the witnesses, who provided useful written and oral evidence, and the departmental officials, who provided clarification and additional information to the Committee throughout the process.

I turn to amendment No 1. During Committee Stage, the Department advised the Committee of its intention to table the amendment, which will make it necessary for a sex offender to notify the police if he plans to be away from his home address for more than three days without leaving the United Kingdom. That provided us with an opportunity to consider it. The PSNI had drawn the attention of the Department to a perceived loophole in the current legislation, meaning that a sex offender who travelled within the UK could use a series of addresses for up to six days at a time without notifying the police. During evidence to the Committee, the Police Service explained that the issue had come to light when there had been difficulty keeping track of an offender who had travelled around the UK but had not stayed at one address for long enough to have to notify the police under the current provisions. The Committee welcomes and fully supports the amendment, as it develops and strengthens the policy in relation to notification requirements and will provide greater public protection.

The Committee also welcomes the Department's intention to introduce secondary legislation that will require an offender to notify all travel outside of the UK and not just travel of three days or more, as is currently the case. The exception to that will be cross-border travel to the Republic of Ireland, which, for practical reasons, will remain unchanged at three days or longer.

While the Committee fully supports the amendment, the same cannot be said of clause 1 and schedule 1, which provide for a review mechanism to enable offenders who are subject to an indefinite period of notification to apply to have the requirements reviewed and discharged after a period of 15 years from the date of initial notification or, in the case of an offender under the age of 18, after eight years. Some members, including me, supported their inclusion in the Bill only on the basis that legislative change is required to ensure that Northern Ireland complies with the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in the case of R and Thompson v Secretary of State for the Home Department. As the Minister has already highlighted, a similar provision was opposed during the passage of the 2010 Justice Bill. Since then, a number of welcome changes have been made that are reflected in this Bill. They include an increase in the further review period from five years to eight years for offenders over the age of 18 and the inclusion in the list of criteria to be taken into account by the Chief Constable when considering an application of information relating to convictions for non-sexual offences, where behaviour since indicates a risk of sexual harm. Some of us also find reassurance in the fact that the review mechanism to be adopted in England and Wales now more closely mirrors the one in front of us today with regard to an application being made to a court for a further determination rather than by way of a judicial review, which was initially considered for that jurisdiction.

I move on to amendment Nos 2 to 11. At Second Stage, the Minister highlighted the fact that the Executive had made it clear that they could not support the introduction of the Bill unless he gave a commitment to table an amendment to clause 3 to allow for a single enhanced process for attaching notification to offenders with convictions from outside the United Kingdom, rather than just from another European Economic Area country, which is what the clause currently covers on the advice of the Attorney General, who was concerned that the Bill would not be compliant with ECHR obligations and would, therefore, be outside the competence of the Assembly if the statutory requirements were placed on offenders from all states outside the United Kingdom.

The Department provided the Committee with information on options to amend clause 3, together with the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. The amendments before us today represent an approach that addresses the concerns of the Executive and the Attorney General. It will place a statutory requirement on offenders with convictions from countries outside the United Kingdom to notify the police after being in residence in Northern Ireland for seven days but provide safeguards to enable offenders to seek to have the requirements discharged by the court if they believe that their conviction in the other country was obtained by abuse of convention rights or to deploy such a defence if charged with an offence of

failing to comply with the notification requirements. The Committee is content that this twin approach addresses the issues that have been raised and supports the amendments.

I now turn to the amendments in this group that relate to the human trafficking provisions. Clauses 5 and 6, which cover human trafficking, attracted substantial responses from a number of organisations during Committee Stage. Although there was broad support for the two new human trafficking offences created by the clauses, other issues were raised in the evidence received by the Committee that are not covered in the Bill.

I will deal with one of the most important issues first, which is addressed by amendment Nos 12 and 13. At the outset, the Committee made it very clear to the Minister that it wanted to see the strongest possible legislation introduced in Northern Ireland in relation to human trafficking. The Committee expressed concerns to the Department about the possibility that, under the Bill as currently drafted, conviction of human trafficking offences would attract a sentence of less than six months or a fine. The Committee felt very strongly that this did not reflect the gravity of the offences. The Committee asked whether the Department had given any consideration to including a mandatory minimum custodial sentence in the legislation. In response, the Department advised that the Minister fully supported the Committee's strongly held view that Northern Ireland should be seen as a hostile place for traffickers and noted that sentencing was one of the tools for tackling this crime. However, the Minister felt that sentencing in an individual case should be a matter for an independent judiciary and highlighted the fact that mandatory minimum sentences allowed no room for discretion and made no allowance for the exceptional case.

The Department subsequently indicated that, in response to the Committee's concerns, the Minister was considering whether there was a case to make the human trafficking offences indictable only, which would mean that offences would be heard in the Crown Court, where the maximum term of imprisonment is 14 years. As a result, the Minister has tabled amendment Nos 12 and 13, which will make the human trafficking offences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 and the new offences created by this Bill triable on indictment only. The Committee is of the view that this more adequately reflects the seriousness of the crime and, therefore, supports the amendments.

In the evidence received by the Committee it was clear that a number of voluntary organisations felt that there was an opportunity to put additional human trafficking measures into legislation by way of the Bill, particularly in relation to protection, assistance and support for victims, including children, training and the availability of proper investigative tools, which they felt the Department had missed. In fact, one of the main criticisms of this area of the Bill was that the Department had adopted a minimalist approach in implementing the EU directive on human trafficking. The Department refutes that claim, indicating that further legislative provision is not required to implement the EU directive, except in the area of support for victims, where consideration is being given to subordinate legislation. It outlined other work that is being taken forward in a wide range of areas. The Committee, however, recognises the merit in making further legislative provision in the additional areas mentioned. It has agreed that it will give further consideration to the matter in the context of Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill on human trafficking, once it is introduced in the Assembly. The Committee will also closely scrutinise the secondary legislation to be brought by the Department to strengthen support for victims of human trafficking.

Another issue that arose during the Committee's scrutiny of this area of the Bill was the complex, piecemeal approach to human trafficking legislation. In particular, there was concern that that approach to legislative reform could lead to a complex and potentially weak legal framework that would make it more difficult for law enforcement officials and legal practitioners to combat human trafficking and to protect and support victims. The Committee understands that the proposals in the Bill seek to copy England and Wales in the substance of the changes to be introduced but achieves that through a different means with the outcome that more trafficking offences will be applicable in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. Concerned that that might cause confusion for victims and create difficulties for law enforcement officials, the Committee raised the matter with the Department. In response, the Department highlighted that the clauses in the Criminal Justice Bill, although drafted in a different style, cover the same range of criminal activities as in England and Wales and mirror the additional provisions introduced in Scotland in relation to the extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Department also indicated that none of the law enforcement agencies that work with the legislative framework had experienced difficulties. It did, however, indicate that it may consider an exercise of consolidation of human trafficking legislation when other pressing areas of work have been completed. That will need to be kept under review, with further thought given to it if there is evidence of confusion.

The last issue that I want to cover relates to the establishment of a national rapporteur for human trafficking. Although the interdepartmental ministerial group, together with the UK Human Trafficking Centre, fulfils the UK obligations in relation to a national rapporteur, some concerns have been raised that the process is not independent of government. The evidence received suggested that countries that have created an independent overseer have seen real success in the quality of information available on human trafficking and the profile of trafficking in their Parliaments. The Committee agreed to raise the issue of an independent national rapporteur with the Minister and may wish to return to that issue during consideration of Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill.

Given our desire to see the strongest possible human trafficking legislation introduced in Northern Ireland, the Committee supports the amendments tabled by the Minister in response to its concerns regarding the sentencing framework for these offences and looks forward to considering the proposals in Lord Morrow's private Member's Bill.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to speak specifically to the sex offenders aspect of the Bill. The Sexual Offences Act featured in the last Justice Bill. It was not voted through as a result of a petition of concern. We now agree on the amendments to the Bill and are now satisfied that the Bill is ECHR-

compliant. That is the proper basis on which the Bill should go forward.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for bringing the Bill forward and progressing issues such as this within the Northern Ireland Assembly and our framework for making powers and legislation. We want to ensure that we, in Northern Ireland, are not seen to be soft on crime or criminals. I hope that the Bill will help us to achieve that. We must also ensure that we remain compliant with human rights legislation. However, it is important that all citizens and, indeed, visitors are given the maximum protection by law, irrespective of what that requires.

To stop human trafficking and sexual exploitation, we need legislation that will inhibit this scourge on our society. We must take every possible step to ensure that those involved in such criminal activity are stopped.

I am pleased that the amendments generally widen the powers of the authorities to deal with such cases. This is particularly relevant in the notification requirement when someone is absent, or will be absent, from a notified residence. Clearly, the amendments also deal with criminal activities outside the European Union. We discussed the National Crime Agency recently, and these are areas in which Northern Ireland would benefit from that agency. That is why I am so disappointed that Members on the opposite side of the House refused to support the proposal for the National Crime Agency to operate here. I cannot understand why they did that — maybe they will be prepared to tell us today — when we could have assistance on issues such as the ones addressed in the Bill —

11.00 am

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to stay within the Bill. We would certainly widen the debate if we went down the avenue that the Member has just gone down. Let us try, as far as possible, to deal with the Bill.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much for that guidance, Mr Speaker. It is much appreciated.

The Bill will have very wide-ranging effects in Northern Ireland. I wonder whether the Minister is preparing to table any further amendments at Further Consideration Stage. We heard the Chair of the Committee talking about Lord Morrow's Bill and whether any other aspects could be incorporated into it. So I would be interested to hear from the Minister on that. The Ulster Unionist Party supports the Bill and the amendments in this group.

Mr A Maginness: It is important to note the work of the Committee, in conjunction with the Department and the Minister, on the Bill. There has been a very good rapport between the Committee and the Minister on the amendments, particularly those in group 1. That is a good example of working together and building consensus.

Clearly, there are concerns about sex offenders and their travels, both within this country and abroad. It is important that notification requirements are made stricter so that one can prevent offences being committed, particularly against children. All of us in the House are very concerned about the welfare of children. We in the SDLP welcome this aspect of the Bill. We believe that the improvements that have been made to the Bill, particularly those that emanated from the Committee, in association with outside groups who informed the Committee very well on the issues that arose, are a good example of working together.

I understand the concerns that people had about the Supreme Court decision in R and Thompson v Secretary of State, which dealt with the indefinite nature of sex offenders being on the sex offenders' register. I understand that people felt that, because of this case, there would be some relaxation in the notification requirements and in the maintenance of that register. However, the Bill has made reasonable and sensible changes: the periods are reasonable and sensible, and the proposed mechanism is a very sensible way of going forward. It provides the public with reassurance that we are not being light on sex offenders and that they will still have strenuous conditions to comply with. That is worthy of note, and we are doing useful business in translating the effects of R and Thompson into law in this jurisdiction.

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

I believe the human trafficking provisions to be sensible, and Members should be confident that that is the right approach. I think that there is a general satisfaction among members of the public and the police with what is proposed, and we are fulfilling our mandate from the public by providing them with protection and by being compliant with human rights. We have taken on board what the Human Rights Commission said and what the Attorney General said about our international obligations, and we should be satisfied with the first group of amendments.

Lord Morrow: I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill.

My remarks will focus in particular on clauses 5 and 6 and the Minister's proposed amendments to them. Like many Members from all sides of the House, I am very much in favour of what is proposed under clauses 5 and 6. The two clauses will bring Northern Ireland into line with article 10 of the European directive on human trafficking and are undoubtedly a positive step forward in tackling that heinous crime in Northern Ireland.

I further welcome the Minister's decision to introduce amendment No 13, and the decision to put into statute a requirement for all human trafficking offences to be triable only on indictment will ensure that appropriate penalties are handed down for those who are convicted of such offences. Members from all sides of the House will agree with the introduction of that amendment, and I thank the Minister for bringing it forward.

I also want to put on record my thanks to the Minister for his decision to introduce an annual human trafficking action plan, which will be reviewed annually. I would prefer to see such a plan placed on a statutory footing, but I believe that it is a positive step forward that will improve the response of the Executive and law enforcement agencies to human trafficking in the Province. In the light of the Minister's decision, I will review whether to include clause 13 of my draft Bill in the final Bill, which will be brought to the Assembly in the very near future.

However, in spite of those positive steps, I must put on record my great disappointment with the minimalist approach that the Minister has taken in the Bill to ensuring compliance with the European directive on human trafficking. It is patently obvious that he has largely

decided to follow the coalition Government at Westminster on the implementing measures to ensure that Northern Ireland is compliant with the EU directive. The Bill fails to ensure compliance with the directive in numerous areas, and I will outline only a few today.

The Bill does not set out in statute a list of aggravating factors that courts need to take into account in sentencing those found guilty of human trafficking and does not ensure in statute that special measures will be provided to victims of human trafficking as of right, as is suggested by GRETA and the European directive. The Bill does not ensure, as article 9.1 recommends, that proceedings should be dependent on the reporting or accusation by the victim and that proceedings should be able to continue if a victim withdraws his or her statement.

Furthermore, the Bill does not seek to introduce a legal advocate for children under the age of 18, which is recommended by articles 14.2 and 16.3 of the European directive and by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) report on this subject. Furthermore, the Bill does not seek to introduce an independent national rapporteur, as is set down by article 19 of the directive. The Minister continues to maintain that the interdepartmental ministerial group is sufficient for this task, but I do not see how it can be argued that Ministers who set policy in this area can be described in any way as independent.

I believe that we have been elected to this House to make real differences to the lives of the most vulnerable. It is apparent to Members from all sides of this House that victims of human trafficking and exploitation in this Province are some of the most vulnerable people on our shores. It is incumbent on us that we seek to ensure that the most effective measures are in place to protect them and support them. It is for this reason that I have put down my own human trafficking and exploitation Bill, which will be coming to the Assembly very shortly. I hope that the Assembly will back my Bill, which seeks to ensure that Northern Ireland is fully compliant with the EU directive on human trafficking.

I thank the Minister for introducing the measures that are outlined in clauses 5 and 6 of the Bill, for introducing amendment No 13 and for his decision to introduce an annual plan with regard to human trafficking. However, I strongly believe that further action is necessary, and I urge the Minister to consider further the measures that I have outlined in my Bill. I would be failing in my duties if I did not say that there are many gaps in this Bill, and, hopefully, my private Member's Bill will seek to close those gaps.

Mr Dickson: I am delighted to speak on the Bill's Consideration Stage, because it has been and is an important piece of work. As the Chair and others said, the Committee has worked very well in the scrutiny phase of the Bill, working with the Minister, the Department and, most importantly, the stakeholders who have an interest in the areas that we have been dealing with in this group of amendments. I thank the hard-working Committee staff for the work that they have done, and I thank all those who contributed to get the Bill to the point where we are today.

The Minister has gone through and explained the amendments that he has brought forward, but I will add the weight of my comments to a few of them. It is important to recognise that the provision for notification by sex offenders, which has been raised by every Member who has spoken thus far, will be unique to Northern Ireland, and it is encouraging that the Assembly is demonstrating its ability to provide legislation not only for people in this jurisdiction but to lead the way. It will be interesting to see whether other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom choose to take interest in what we are doing. It is encouraging that the police brought this to our attention and that the Department has acted on that information. It is encouraging that we are now sitting in this place legislating for that. As well as providing additional protection to the public and assistance to the police, it demonstrates the continued benefits of devolved policing and justice.

I also welcome the amendments to clause 3, which should offer the appropriate protection, while providing for people from states with poor human rights standards who may have been wrongly convicted. It provides a clear and real opportunity for those matters to be dealt with. The NSPCC in particular highlighted the importance of the provision requiring offenders to notify the police on entry to Northern Ireland, as the current arrangements placed unnecessary responsibility on the police to find those offenders and to get them to a register and apply a notification order. The Minister has very helpfully explained to the House that the existing provision is limited because of the concerns that were expressed by the Attorney General, but I thank the Minister and the Attorney General for working together and working out a resolution to this matter. They have worked out the difficulties and worked through this in the scrutiny process with us in the Committee.

I turn to amendment Nos 12 and 13 and welcome the proposals that all human trafficking offences will now be tried on indictment in the Crown Court. This sends out a very clear message that offenders can be sentenced for up to, generally, 14 years.

11.15 am

In recent years, the horrors of human trafficking have become more and more apparent, and society rightly calls, and has called for, a robust response. It is imperative that those crimes are treated seriously and that the sentences reflect the gravity of the offences. I welcome that those sentences will be included in the schedule of offences that can be referred to the Court of Appeal on the grounds that they may be considered unduly lenient. I think that that also sends out a very clear message when dealing with those matters.

It is vital that we make clear that we abhor at all times human trafficking and all that flows from it and that it will not be tolerated in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is sending out a very clear message today that we are closed to human traffickers. That is the objective and the core of amendment Nos 12 and 13.

I support the amendments, and I believe that they will strengthen the Bill. The Alliance Party will support this group of amendments.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tagairt a dhéanamh do na clásail a bhaineas le human trafficking.

I would like to refer to the clauses relating to human trafficking. Like others on the Committee, we share concerns about the rising incidence of human trafficking, and we wish to see what measures need to be taken to

address it. Therefore, we welcome the recommended changes, and we would like to see the law strengthened in that regard.

Tacaímid leis na leasuithe. We support the amendments.

Mr D McIlveen: I support this part of the Bill.

I now chair the all-party group on human trafficking. The issues on the trading of human beings as objects has been well rehearsed in the Assembly, so I do not think that it is necessary to go down that road again. Obviously, I take heart in hearing from my colleague Lord Morrow, because I believe that some additional tightening-up is required for this whole issue and that Lord Morrow's Bill will seek to do that.

We have to acknowledge that considerable advances have been made. I support, in particular, the provision that states that:

> *"A person found guilty of an offence under this section is liable ... on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 14 years."*

We have a position at the minute whereby someone who has been trafficking human beings can go before a magistrate and effectively be viewed in the same way as someone who has committed a speeding offence. We should bear in mind that article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights states very clearly that the trading of human beings and forced labour are grotesque crimes. I think that it is essential that higher penalties are imposed and that this place is made as hostile for human traffickers as we can possibly have it.

Moving forward, we also need to look at how this whole business is promoted. I obviously support the fact that we are looking at a private Member's Bill that will effectively make it illegal for someone to pay for sexual services. However, I think that, at a later stage, we will need to look at how we can deal with the advertising of sexual services. I am thinking particularly about the idea of escorts. I think that there is a traditional view of an escort, who used to be a rather lovely person for somebody to spend an evening with. Obviously, the 21st century definition of the word "escort" has changed somewhat. We now have the word "escort" used as a euphemism to try to legitimately put forward services that also cover human trafficking. So, I think that we will have to look at that issue to see how the advertising of sexual services and of people who could be victims of trafficking may be looked into in the future.

We need to keep our finger on the pulse of the issues that are before us. I believe that the Bill implements a number of recommendations that have already been put forward, particularly from the GRETA report. We need better central data collection for this issue. This is still a problem. We need to look at how quickly victims are repatriated, and those are all bigger issues specifically around human trafficking that need to be addressed. Unfortunately, the facts in Northern Ireland speak for themselves. We have seen only two convictions for human trafficking. More has to be done, given the problem that we have here.

I believe that we have certainly come far in the few years that this has been put at the top of the agenda with the all-party group and now the private Member's Bill. However, we have to continue to make sure that we are not a gateway to the UK. We have been identified as a weak link when it comes to transporting victims of trafficking from other parts of the European Union into this part of the United Kingdom, and then on to England, Scotland and Wales. We have to recognise the unfortunately unique position that we find ourselves in geographically with having another European Union country with a land border here in Northern Ireland.

I support the Bill and the amendments, and commend them to the House. However, I hope that we will continue to deal with the grotesque issue of human trafficking and that support will be given, as Lord Morrow has said, for his Bill, which, I believe, will further tighten up the law around that issue.

Mr Allister: I generally welcome the Bill. In this group of amendments, I particularly welcome the moves being taken to deal more adequately with trafficking offences, the removal of those offences to the Crown Court, and the capacity to make those referable by the authorities in terms of the adequacy of sentences. Those are sensible, wise and necessary provisions.

In looking at the detail of amendment No 1, there are a couple of issues that I would like the Minister to address and to satisfy himself that the clause, as drafted, is exactly as intended and will not create unwarranted circumstances that could be avoidable. Amendment No 1, as I understand it, will, understandably, introduce the requirement for sex offenders to give notification of their travel and accommodation plans if they are travelling for more than three days. That will apply whether they are going to Suffolk, Portrush or anywhere in the United Kingdom. The requirement in amendment No 1, under what will be section 85A(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, is that the relevant offender, not less than 12 hours before leaving his home address, must notify the police of the required information.

The circumstance that I want to address the Minister's mind to is this: what happens when someone is faced with an emergency requirement to travel? They are, in the terms of the legislation, a sex offender. I remind the House that the ambit of sex offender is huge under schedule 3 of the 2003 Act. It includes the person who has a conviction for unlawful carnal knowledge with a girl under the age of 17 at the time in Northern Ireland and who, himself, was over 20. That person attaches to himself the categorisation of sex offender. Some years may have passed, and they may be a much more settled individual. Yet if that person, in a family situation, has an emergency or is required, because of a family accident, to travel to Scotland or Fermanagh to be with someone who has been critically injured in an accident, they must go. However, they cannot go for 12 hours because they must let 12 hours pass before they can notify. Is that really what the Minister intends?

I understand perfectly that the recidivist sex offender must and should be sat upon very severely by the law in terms of their movements. That is essential, necessary and right. But when we draft laws, we draft them for the wide ambit of people to whom they apply. They also apply to individuals at the margins, both in time and quality, of the offending. I ask the Minister whether it is necessary on that detail to have that restriction, that time limitation of not less than 12 hours before they can leave their home address to deal with what could be a family emergency. That is something that the Minister should look at.

Remember, too, that the penalty in some sex offending that puts you on the register can be a caution. That can be a consequence that makes you into a sex offender. So I am not dissenting from the wisdom and necessity of requiring sex offenders to give notification. I am questioning whether, in every circumstance and every case, a blanket application such as here is doing justice to the circumstances. I invite the Minister to respond and consider that.

I invite him also to tell the House: what is the parallel provision with the person faced with the need to travel within Northern Ireland, to which this new sanction will apply, and the person desiring to travel to, say, Donegal? If someone wants to go to Portrush for three days, they must notify. If they want to go to Donegal for three days, is it the same provision? Must they equally notify? Perhaps the Minister will clarify that, because it is important that there is some parity of approach on these matters.

You may have people who, at relatively short notice, are offered three days' work somewhere. They go, they stay, they work. Are they subject to the same provisions whether that job is across the border or in Northern Ireland? Have we got that parity of provision?

I stress that I very much support the general thrust of the Bill, particularly the provisions on trafficking. Apart from those few remarks, I am very happy to support the direction of travel of the Bill.

Mr Ford: I thank those Members who took part in this section of the debate. I also thank those who took part in the work of the Committee, and my staff who engaged with the Committee. As has been acknowledged by a number of Members around the House, there has been very positive and useful engagement between the Department and the Committee, which has produced a set of largely agreed amendments.

On the specific issue of the first group of amendments relating to sex offenders, I believe that we are showing in the Bill that our primary aim is to continue to offer the best possible protection for all the community in Northern Ireland from the risk posed by sex offenders.

The notification requirements of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are important to realising that aim. I wish to acknowledge that, in his contribution, the Committee Chair noted that some members were not entirely enthusiastic about that provision, but have accepted that it is balanced and necessary, given our obligations. As other Members highlighted, notably Alban Maginness and Stewart Dickson, it is a matter of the balance of our obligations.

11.30 am

Specifically, the new clause on travel within the UK, which has just been referred to by Mr Allister, allows us to add to the effectiveness of the information that has to be given to the police and represents a balanced response to the current gap in the overall provisions. My understanding, as I am sure some Members will be pleased to regard, is that travel to the Republic of Ireland, including short distances across the border into Donegal, is already covered by provisions in legislation relating to international travel. This is about ensuring that we maintain similar provisions within the United Kingdom. So, there is already provision if somebody is going to Dunfanaghy. The issue now is to ensure that we have suitable provisions should they go to Downpatrick.

It has been recognised that extending the process to offenders coming from all jurisdictions outside the UK is a positive step forward; one which required considerable work by the Attorney General and the Committee. I am grateful for what has been done to ensure that we strengthen our arrangements, make them more effective and enhance the ability to protect people from risk.

We have an obligation, this morning, to acknowledge the good work done by a number of agencies, led principally by the probation service and the police within the public protection arrangements; organisations that will use and enforce the legislation. The new proposal will underpin the work that they do to make the difference in keeping society safe.

It is fair to say that there was more discussion on the general issue of human trafficking than on the sex offender notifications. There are clearly issues that Members see as going beyond proposed amendment Nos 12 and 13. However, there does seem to be a general welcome for those amendments, in particular to ensure that we regard the offence of human trafficking sufficiently seriously that it is triable only on indictment in the Crown Courts. Mr Elliott asked whether I am planning further amendments in that respect. The answer is no, I am not. I believe that the provisions we already have in statute and the provisions we are introducing in the Bill as amended reflect the seriousness of human trafficking offences in terms of the consequences for victims and send out the strong message that this abhorrent crime will not be tolerated in Northern Ireland.

Lord Morrow asked a series of questions, and Paul Givan, as Committee Chair, started off with a reference to the national rapporteur. I will deal briefly with some of those points, although I suspect that it is an issue that is likely to come before the House again in different guises.

The specific point of the directive for a national rapporteur is that it is for a national rapporteur, not a regional rapporteur. We do not have the ability to establish a national rapporteur. As a member of the Home Office-led interdepartmental ministerial group on human trafficking, I argued at the first meeting I went to for a wider involvement of NGOs in that work; specifically, as a minimum, the NGOs that provide direct services to the victims of trafficking. It was an argument made by some other Ministers. It was an argument that did not win favour with the Home Office, which provides the lead for the UK as a whole. We may wish to see greater provisions around the national rapporteur, but that is a matter that lies in the gift of the Westminster Parliament and the Home Office. It is not something that we can deal with here.

However, I reject the suggestion that what the Department of Justice is doing is a minimalist approach to legislation, simply mirroring that of the Government of England and Wales, which is, in that context, what the Home Office largely is. I do not believe that that is the case. In many ways, the provisions that we have put in the Bill and those that are already in place in Northern Ireland go significantly beyond the provisions for England and Wales. For example, we have implemented some of the discretionary issues referred to in the EU directive, not merely the mandatory ones, so that we extend the law

to habitual residents of Northern Ireland and to bodies incorporated under the law of any part of the United Kingdom. That is going beyond a minimalist approach. The maximum penalty for human trafficking offences in Northern Ireland being set at 14 years and the guarantee that all offences will go to the Crown Court exceeds the mandatory requirement under the EU directive. Ensuring that trials are only on indictment will guarantee and underpin that that is how we see things there.

I have also said that I am looking at the option of secondary legislation for putting assistance and support for victims during the recovery and reflection period on a statutory basis, and my officials are examining how that would work. The administrative arrangements for support for victims, again, go beyond the minimum 30-day requirement that exists under the directive. These measures, and anything we propose, have to add to the existing position and not simply replicate what exists in other places.

Similarly, Lord Morrow raised the issue of a legal advocate for children. That is perfectly reasonable, but it is a matter for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and not for the Minister of Justice. I understand entirely the motivation, but I cannot interfere with another Department on that.

Mr McIlveen raised the issue of there having been only two convictions for human trafficking in Northern Ireland. That, of course, is an operational issue for the relevant bodies, but there have been two prosecutions and both resulted in conviction. Other cases are in the system, and a landmark judgement has made it clear how seriously the courts take the matter. Potential victims in Northern Ireland have been rescued from trafficking. Of course, we also wish there to be prosecutions, where prosecutions are possible. I believe, however, that we are already showing, for example, in general legislation, that aggravating factors are taken into account in all criminal cases and do not need to be specified for trafficking. Special measures are available for all vulnerable victims and do not need to be added purely for victims of trafficking.

The issue of whether proceedings can continue, depending on whether a statement is withdrawn by a witness, comes within the existing prosecutorial test administered by the PPS.

All of those are key points in which matters are being dealt with, and adequately so, at present. I certainly do not wish Northern Ireland to be seen, in any way, as a friendly place for traffickers, but I do not believe that that is the case. I believe that our legislation, underpinned by what we propose today, will ensure that that message is sent out. We will continue to keep operational matters under review, without necessarily needing to say that everything needs to be in statute. Indeed, I welcome Lord Morrow's acceptance that it is not necessarily beneficial for the annual plan to be in statute. What is important is that we have the annual plan and that we show that that is an important issue for all of us.

Finally, I return to the sex offender issue and the final point made by Jim Allister about emergency travel. It appears to me that Mr Allister quite reasonably points out that the provisions of the proposed new clause are reasonable, but that there may be certain circumstances, which, I suspect, even he will agree are fairly rare, in which somebody may, because of a family illness or bereavement, wish to travel in an emergency and not be able to give 12 hours' notice. If Mr Allister is prepared to accept that we should pass this new clause today, I will certainly undertake to look to use Further Consideration Stage in the way that it is intended to see whether it is possible to introduce a further subsection that would make it clear what needs to apply should emergency travel be needed for that kind of family emergency.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: Certainly.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister accept that the matter could be rectified very straightforwardly by inserting a clause to the effect that there is a defence if there is reasonable excuse. If, for instance, without reasonable excuse, someone travels without giving the required notice, they have offended the law, but, if they can show reasonable excuse, they have not offended the law. I think that something along those lines would meet the situation.

Mr Ford: It is always good to have a lawyer behind me, as well as the lawyers who advise me elsewhere. We can discuss the precise details of that point. Mr Allister's suggestion may well be the best way of dealing with it, but I think that there is an acceptance around the House that what is proposed is appropriate but requires a little tweaking to deal with emergency situations. I am happy to give an undertaking that we will do that and return at Further Consideration Stage, if the House agrees the new clause today.

That, I believe, Mr Deputy Speaker, has summarised the key comments that were made in the debate. I am extremely grateful for the broad support from all sides of the House for this group of amendments.

Lord Morrow: Before the Minister sits down, will he give way? He mentioned the fact that I had welcomed —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, Lord Morrow. I believe that the Minister had already —

Lord Morrow: He had given way.

Mr Ford: Mr Deputy Speaker, if Lord Morrow wishes to intervene quickly, I am prepared to stand up again and continue with further thanks to Members.

Lord Morrow: I ask the Minister to give way. I suspect that he would. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Thanks, too, to the Minister. I just want to clarify a point. He is right as far as he goes. He said that I had welcomed the fact and had acknowledged the introduction of an annual human-trafficking action plan. However, the wee bit that he, conveniently, left out, which I did go on to say, was that I would like to have seen that put on a statutory basis. I ask the Minister to take cognisance of that.

Mr Ford: I thought that I had actually said that in my remarks. I certainly acknowledge that Lord Morrow believes that the annual plan should be statutory. My position is that if the Department is committed to publishing a plan annually in consultation with other elements of the justice system, it is not necessary to put it on a statutory basis. We are all agreed on the importance of a plan. We are all agreed on the importance of showing that the House and the justice system are united against those who would engage in the foul crime of trafficking. As for the precise method and whether the plan is statutory,

Lord Morrow and I will have to continue to debate those issues.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Offences committed in an EEA State other than the United Kingdom)

Amendment No 2 made: In page 2, line 31, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 3 made: In page 2, line 32, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 4 made: In page 2, line 35, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 5 made: In page 3, line 14, leave out "State" and insert "country". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 6 made: In page 3, line 24, leave out

"to the modifications set out below"

and insert

"—

(a) in all cases, to the modifications set out below; and

(b) in a case where the first condition mentioned in subsection (2) is met by reason of a conviction, finding or caution in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe, to the further provisions in section 96AA." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 7 made: In page 4, line 18, leave out "State" and insert "country". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 8 made: In page 4, line 24, leave out "an EEA State other than" and insert "a country outside". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Amendment No 9 made: In page 4, line 25, at end insert

"Convictions, etc. in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe

96AA.—(1) The further provisions referred to in section 96A(5)(b) are as follows.

(2) Where P is charged with an offence under section 91(1)(a), it is a defence for P to prove that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(3) P shall cease to be subject to the notification requirements of this Part by virtue of section 96A if the High Court, on an application made by P in accordance with rules of court, so orders; but the High Court shall not make such an order unless it is satisfied that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(4) A conviction, finding or caution falls within this subsection if the relevant court is satisfied—

(a) that any investigations or proceedings leading to it were conducted in a way which contravened any of the Convention rights which P would have had if those investigations or proceedings had taken place in the United Kingdom; and

(b) that contravention was such that, in the opinion of the court, the conviction, finding or caution cannot safely be relied on for the purposes of meeting the condition in section 96A(2).

(5) In this section—

"the relevant conviction, finding or caution" means the conviction, finding or caution by reason of which P is subject, by virtue of section 96A, to the notification requirements of this Part;

"the relevant court" means—

(a) in a case to which subsection (2) applies, the court before which P is charged;

(b) in a case to which subsection (3) applies, the High Court." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

11.45 am

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 10 and 11 have already been debated and are consequential to a number of earlier amendments to clause 3. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly to group these amendments for the question.

Amendment No 10 made: In page 4, line 26, leave out from beginning to "section 97" in line 29 and insert

"(3) Omit sections 97 to 101 (notification orders).

(4) Subsection (3) (and the related repeals in Part 1 of Schedule 4) do not affect the validity or effect of any order made under section 97 or 100". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 11 made: In page 4, leave out line 33 and insert "for "98" substitute "96A(6)" ". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 (Trafficking people for sexual exploitation)

Amendment No 12 made: In page 6, line 2, leave out paragraph (a). — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Mr Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 13 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 12.

Amendment No 13 made: After clause 6 insert

"Trafficking offences to be triable only on indictment

***6A**.—(1) In section 57(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).*

(2) In section 58(2) of that Act (trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(3) In section 59(2) of that Act (trafficking out of the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(4) In section 4(5) of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 (trafficking people for exploitation) omit paragraph (b).

(5) This section does not apply in relation to an offence committed before this section comes into operation." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 14, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 15 to 17 and Nos 38 to 41. Those amendments deal with the release on licence of children convicted of serious crime, the examination of a defendant through a registered intermediary and the abolition of the offence of scandalising the judiciary.

I call the Minister of Justice to move amendment No 14 and to address the other amendments in the group.

New Clause

Mr Ford: I beg to move amendment No 14: After clause 7 insert

"Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

7A.—*(1) In Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (child convicted of serious offence) for "notwithstanding any other provisions of this Order" substitute "subject to Articles 46 to 46B".*

(2) In Article 45 of that Order after paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) Where a court passes a sentence under paragraph (2), the court shall specify such part of the sentence as the court considers appropriate as the relevant part of the sentence for the purposes of Article 46 (release on licence).".

(3) For Article 46 of that Order substitute—

"Release on licence

46.—(1) In this Article—

(a) "P" means a person detained under Article 45(2);

(b) "the Commissioners" means the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;

(c) "the Department" means the Department of Justice; and

(d) references to the relevant part of P's sentence are references to the part of P's sentence specified as such under Article 45(2A).

(2) As soon as—

(a) P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, and

(b) the Commissioners have directed P's release under this Article,

the Department shall release P on licence.

(3) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (2) with respect to P unless—

(a) the Department has referred P's case to the Commissioners; and

(b) the Commissioners are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(4) P may require the Department to refer P's case to the Commissioners at any time—

(a) after P has served the relevant part of P's sentence; and

(b) where there has been a previous reference of P's case to the Commissioners under paragraph (3) or Article 46B(4), after the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the disposal of that reference.

(5) In determining for the purposes of this Article whether P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, no account shall be taken of any time during which P was unlawfully at large, unless the Department otherwise directs.

(6) The Department may at any time release P on licence if it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist which justify P's release on compassionate grounds.

(7) Before releasing P under paragraph (6), the Department shall consult the Commissioners, unless the circumstances are such as to render such consultation impracticable.

(8) Nothing in this Article requires the Department to release a person in respect of a sentence under Article 45(2) at any time when that person is liable to be detained in respect of any other sentence.

Duration and conditions of licences under Article 46

46A.—(1) Where a person is released on licence under Article 46, the licence shall, unless previously revoked under Article 46B, remain in force until the expiry of the period for which the person was sentenced to be detained.

(2) A person released on licence under Article 46 shall comply with such conditions as may for the time being be specified in the licence (which may include on release conditions as to supervision by a probation officer).

(3) The Department of Justice shall not, except in accordance with recommendations of the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland—

(a) include a condition in a licence on release,

(b) subsequently insert a condition in a licence, or

(c) vary or cancel any condition in a licence.

Recall of licensees

46B.—(1) In this Article—

"P" means a person who has been released on licence under Article 46;

"the Commissioners" and "the Department" have the meanings given in Article 46(1).

(2) The Department may revoke P's licence and recall P to detention—

(a) if recommended to do so by the Commissioners, or

(b) without such a recommendation, if it appears to the Department that it is expedient in the public interest to recall P before such a recommendation is practicable.

(3) P—

(a) shall, on P's return to detention, be informed of the reasons for the recall and of the right conferred by sub-paragraph (b); and

(b) may make representations in writing to the Department with respect to the recall.

(4) The Department shall refer P's case to the Commissioners.

(5) Where on a reference under paragraph (4) the Commissioners direct P's immediate release on licence under Article 46, the Department shall give effect to the direction.

(6) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (5) unless they are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(7) On the revocation of P's licence, P shall be liable to be detained in pursuance of P's sentence and, if at large, shall be treated as being unlawfully at large.".

(4) In Article 46(3) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (functions of Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland) at the end add "or Articles 46 to 46B of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

(5) Where—

(a) on commencement a person is detained in pursuance of a sentence under Article 45(2) of the 1998 Order, and

(b) the Department, after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge if available, certifies its opinion that, if the amendments made by this section had been in operation at the time when that person was sentenced, the court by which that person was sentenced would have specified as the relevant part of the sentence such part as is specified in the certificate,

Article 46 of the 1998 Order (as substituted) shall apply as if the relevant part of that person's sentence for the purposes of that Article were the part specified in the certificate.

(6) But subsection (5) does not apply (and subsection (7) applies instead) where that person is a person whose licence has been revoked under Article 46(2) of the 1998 Order.

(7) Where this subsection applies, paragraphs (3) to (6) of Article 46B of the 1998 Order have effect as if that person had been recalled to prison under paragraph (2) of that Article on commencement.

(8) Articles 46A and 46B of the 1998 Order apply to an existing licensee as they apply to a person who is released on licence under Article 46 of that Order (as substituted).

(9) In this section—

"commencement" means the date on which this section comes into operation;

"existing licensee" means a person who, before commencement, has been discharged on licence under Article 46 of the 1998 Order and whose licence is in force on commencement;

"the 1998 Order" means the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 15: After clause 7 insert

"Examination of accused through intermediary

Examination of accused through intermediary

***7B**.—(1) In section 12(1) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (which at the passing of this Act is not in operation), the inserted Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is amended as follows.*

(2) At the beginning of paragraph (2) insert "Subject to paragraph (2A),".

(3) After paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) A court may not give a direction under paragraph (3) unless—

(a) the court has been notified by the Department of Justice that arrangements for implementing such a direction have been made in relation to that court; and

(b) the notice has not been withdrawn.

(2B) The withdrawal of a notice given to a court under paragraph (2A) does not affect the operation of any direction under paragraph (3) given by that court before the notice is withdrawn."." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 16: After clause 7 insert

"Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as form of contempt of court

***7C**.—(1) Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law.*

(2) That abolition does not prevent proceedings for contempt of court being brought against a person for conduct that immediately before that abolition would have constituted both scandalising the judiciary and some other form of contempt of court." — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

No 17: In clause 9, page 8, line 2, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

"(1) Except as provided by subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (Notification requirements: absence from notified address);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 38: In the long title, leave out "and to" and insert "; to". — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 39: In the long title, at end insert

"; to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 40: In the long title, at end insert

"; and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999".— *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 41: In the long title, at end insert

"and to abolish the common law offence of scandalising the judiciary". — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

Mr Ford: We all know that, every so often, children commit and are convicted of grave offences. In law, that is defined as an offence for which an adult could receive a custodial sentence of 14 years or more. Typically, it will involve a very serious sexual or physical assault. In those circumstances, the standard juvenile justice centre order, with its maximum duration of two years, is not always adequate.

Courts, therefore, have at their disposal determinate detention orders under article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, which allows them to pass sentences that properly reflect the gravity of the crime. There have been only four or five such orders in the past 10 years, and none has been made since 2008.

Under existing provisions, it is entirely a matter for the Minister of Justice to determine when or if during the sentence a child should be released on licence, the conditions of that licence and matters of breach of licence and recall to custody. As currently framed, the Minister's power is completely unfettered.

Following a recent legal challenge, article 45(2) detention orders and associated article 46 licences have been declared non-compliant with articles 5 and 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights in that they make no provision for the required inclusion in the process of an independent judicial element to determine matters of release, licence conditions and recall to custody. The amendment remedies the matter by removing the Minister of Justice from the process, requiring the court to specify a point at which release on licence should be considered and introducing the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland as the appropriate independent judicial element for determining matters of release, licence conditions and recall to custody.

This not only makes the provisions ECHR compliant but brings them fully into line with all other similar custodial sentences that involve release on licence, such as the extended and indeterminate custodial orders used for public protection. We are, in effect, doing no more than replicating the arrangements that already exist for those other orders.

Amending the provisions in this way maintains an important sentencing option for the courts, meets our convention obligations, links the detention orders to established provisions for other similar orders and strengthens the processes for establishing risk and protecting the public. Crucially, it will also allow us to place the management of the small number of existing cases on a rational and compliant footing.

I now turn to amendment No 15, which inserts a new clause 7B, which involves a minor technical amendment to article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. That order deals with the examination of an accused person through a registered intermediary. Intermediaries are communication specialists who assist victims, witnesses and defendants with significant communication deficits to communicate their answers more effectively during interview and when giving evidence at trial.

The registered intermediary scheme will be piloted at the Crown Court sitting in Belfast for certain types of offences following commencement of this provision. The new clause inserts a requirement that a statutory notice must be given to a court by the Department before that court may give a direction permitting the examination of an accused through an intermediary. It also provides that the notice can be withdrawn by the Department, and the power of the court to give an intermediary direction, therefore, ceases to exist. The amendment is technical in that it ensures that there is legislative consistency in this respect between the provisions dealing with the accused, and victims and witnesses.

The amendment standing in the name of the Committee Chair relates to the repeal of the common law offence of scandalising the court. I thank the Committee for the work that it has undertaken in bringing forward this amendment. The amendment to insert a new clause 7C equates to that which has been brought forward for England and Wales in the Crime and Courts Bill [HL].

As Members will know, I declined an offer to include Northern Ireland in that Bill because I believe that this is the appropriate place for legislation to be shaped for Northern Ireland — in this Assembly. Before bringing forward an amendment to repeal the offence, England and Wales had the benefit of a Law Commission consultation to gauge views. My preference would have allowed for an opportunity to consult similarly in Northern Ireland at an appropriate time, and to find out whether there were other changes that might be needed to protect the courts. The Committee, however, has chosen, as is its right, to bring forward this amendment, which it is able to do with less of a consultation process than the Department would have been obliged to carry out. I am entirely content that the House decide the issue today.

Finally in this group of amendments is the issue of amendment No 17, which amends the Bill's commencement arrangements. As was the case at introduction, the provision on sex offenders, except those relating to obsolete offences, and on DNA and fingerprints will be commenced by order at a date or dates to be determined. All the other provisions now in the Bill, however, will come into operation immediately after Royal Assent. Amendment Nos 38 to 41 similarly augment the long title to reflect the addition of the new provisions.

I recommend the amendments standing in my name to the House. I am certainly interested to hear the comments from around the House on the Committee Chair's amendment.

Mr Givan: First, I wish to speak on amendment No 16, which the Committee for Justice has brought to the Assembly and which seeks to abolish the offence of scandalising the judiciary as a form of contempt of court under common law, and amendment No 41, which is a consequential amendment that is needed to the long title as a result of our proposed amendment.

I am very pleased to bring amendment No 16 to the House today. The rationale for such an offence derived from the need to uphold public confidence in the administration of justice. However, the last recorded successful prosecutions in England and Wales were in the 1930s. The offence has recently been described as "virtually obsolete." The offence is archaic and should be consigned to the history books.

Members will be well aware that, in March 2012, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland brought a prosecution against Peter Hain MP for the common-law offence of scandalising the court for statements that he made in his book 'Outside In', in which he criticised a judge. The court was invited to make no order after Mr Hain clarified the intention behind his remarks. The prosecution attracted significant media and political interest at the time, with questions being raised about the right to freedom of expression and such criticism being regarded as political speech, and, therefore, under the European Convention on Human Rights, subject to the highest degree of protection, although absolute, and whether the offence was obsolete. Indeed, it was raised by the former Home Secretary, Mr David Blunkett, during Prime Minister's Questions, when he asked:

> *"Should not respect for the ... judiciary be balanced with the rights of individuals to fair comment on that judiciary?"*

The Prime Minister replied:

> *"let me just say this: there are occasions, as we all know, when judges make critical remarks about politicians; and there are occasions when politicians make critical remarks about judges. To me, that is part of life in a modern democracy, and we ought to keep these things, as far as possible, out of the courtroom."*

The prosecution prompted an amendment to be laid by Lord Pannick QC in the House of Lords in relation to the Crime and Courts Bill, proposing the repeal without replacement of the offence of scandalising the court for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In bringing forward the amendment, Lord Pannick argued:

> *"There is simply no justification today for maintaining a criminal offence of being rude about the judiciary-scandalising the judges or, as the Scots call it, murmuring judges. We do not protect other public officials in this way. Judges, like all other public servants, must be open to criticism because, in this context as in others, freedom of expression helps to expose error and injustice. It promotes debate on issues of public importance. A criminal offence of scandalising the judiciary may inhibit others from speaking out on perceived judicial errors."*

When referring to the case taken by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland against Peter Hain, Lord Pannick stated:

> *"This bizarre episode has damaged the reputation of the legal system in Northern Ireland".*

The amendment was withdrawn at Committee Stage to allow the Government time to consider the matter.

The Minister of Justice subsequently wrote to the Committee, informing it that the Minister of State, Lord McNally, had advised that, having considered and consulted on the issue, the Government were minded to support the amendment and wished to know whether Northern Ireland wanted to be included in it. The Minister indicated his preference for local legislation, and stated that he considered that it would be more appropriate for the matter to be looked at separately in a Northern Ireland context.

He, therefore, advised Lord McNally that Northern Ireland should not be included in the Crime and Courts Bill, and asked his officials to take forward work to seek views on this in Northern Ireland. When asked by the Committee for the timescale for completion of that work, the Minister indicated that, subject to any other competing priorities, he planned to take forward a consultation on the issue in the new year.

The Committee considered the matter, and was of the view that the Criminal Justice Bill could provide an appropriate vehicle in which to take forward the repeal of that offence now. The Committee, therefore, agreed that an amendment should be drafted on that basis, and sought advice on whether such an amendment would fall within the scope of the Bill. The Committee also agreed to seek the views of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, given his interest in the matter, and noted the results of the consultation that was undertaken by the Law Commission in England and Wales, in which there was general support for abolition of the offence in those jurisdictions.

The Attorney General responded by outlining that the Criminal Justice Bill might provide an opportunity to recast scandalising contempt in statutory form rather than repealing the offence. The Committee, however, disagreed, and stated that it wished to see the offence of scandalising the court abolished in Northern Ireland and was content to take forward an appropriate amendment.

Subsequently, during the debate in the House of Lords on 10 December to ratify the amendment in the Crime and Courts Bill, Lord Carswell, a former Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, indicated his support for the amendment.

He stated:

> *"I have to say, and I hope that they will take this into account, that I cannot see any reason why judges in Northern Ireland should have any different protection from judges in England and Wales against scandalising. I think the same considerations apply, and having been a judge there for 20 years, I would certainly not wish to see any differentiation."*

When he said "they", he was referring to the authorities in Northern Ireland.

Following confirmation that the amendment was admissible, the Committee finalised its wording, which is in front of Members today. On the basis that I have outlined, the right thing to do is to abolish the offence in Northern Ireland. The Committee seeks the support of the Assembly for amendment Nos 16 and 41.

12.00 noon

Before I proceed, I also want to speak about this in my capacity as an individual Member. I want to cover a number of areas for the benefit of Members.

First, I want to put on record my appreciation to Lord Justice Girvan and the Attorney General for taking the actions they did. As a result of their actions, this amendment is before us, and the House can ensure that public confidence is not damaged any further than it was by the action taken against Peter Hain. If Members have not reflected on the commentary on this issue in the House of Lords, where there has been considerable debate, there are a number of quotes that, I think, they would benefit from hearing. With Members' indulgence, I plan to go through some of them.

Obviously, Members are aware of Peter Hain's book. Lord Pannick quoted from it in the House of Lords, for Members' benefit, when he said:

> *"Mr Hain had described the judge and his conduct as 'high-handed and idiosyncratic' and he added that he thought the judge 'off his rocker'."*

Lord Pannick went on to say:

> *"Whatever the merits or lack of — I take no position on this — in Mr Hain's critical comments, surely a former Secretary of State, or indeed any citizen, should be able to express his views about a judge without being threatened with a prison sentence."*

I share that view. Lord Pannick also said:

> *"The irony is that public confidence in the judiciary is undermined far more by legal proceedings that suggest that the judiciary is a delicate flower that will wilt and die without protection from criticism than by a hostile book or newspaper comment that would otherwise have been ignored."*

I share entirely the sentiments expressed by Lord Pannick.

This place has the duty — above the judiciary — to ensure that the public have confidence in and support for the functions exercised by the judiciary. That is why the amendment is before Members today. It is there so that we can undo the damage caused by the ridicule and embarrassment that resulted from the case that was taken against Peter Hain.

It is unfair for Members to lay the blame for this solely at the feet of the Attorney General. I disagree with his actions in taking that case, but he made it clear to the Justice Committee that he had received correspondence from Lord Justice Girvan on the issue. So, we had a judge corresponding with the Attorney General on the matter: that is inappropriate. It is not just the Attorney General who we are having to deal with through the amendment. We are also having to ensure that public confidence in our judiciary and the way it operates is not further damaged. Indeed, by passing the amendment today, we can restore public confidence in the way in which the judiciary operates.

The case was withdrawn, and it is important to acknowledge that the Attorney General did not, ultimately, proceed. However, it is important for Members to put the reason why the case did not proceed into context. It did not proceed because Peter Hain provided clarification that it was not his intention to undermine judicial independence in any way. That is why the case did not proceed. It was not necessarily because of the public furore that surrounded it, including the Prime Minister getting involved at Question Time; it was because Peter Hain clarified that that was not his intention, Interestingly, that was touched on in the House of Lords by Lord Bew:

> *"The Attorney-General made it clear that he would not have set aside the proceedings until the receipt of the letter from the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Hain. In that letter, Mr Hain effectively argued that it had not been his intention in any way to challenge the independence and fairness of the judiciary in Northern Ireland. This is an important point, because I think it quite likely that the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland had in mind the dictum of Lord Russell of Killowen, perhaps the greatest of all the Northern Irish judges of the last century. In 1900, as Chief Justice of England, he offered a dictum in this sort of case that intention was crucial and that there had to be a calculated and clearly deliberate attempt to challenge the independence of the judiciary. By his letter, the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Hain, put himself on the right side of that dictum by saying that he had no intention in any way to challenge the independence of the judiciary in Northern Ireland.*
>
> *What this reveals is that the Attorney-General and Sir Declan Morgan, the Lord Chief Justice, as far as I can understand from the remarks that he made at the time that this was a public matter, believe that there was in principle a case in law here, and a legal case that could be taken. That is why we have proposed this amendment. If there is any possibility that there could be such a case brought, which I think would widely be regarded as absurd, we must do what we can to eliminate that possibility."*

That, in my view, puts into context why the case did not proceed. That is why I agree with Lord Bew that, if there is any prospect of this case being taken forward, on whatever grounds, it does not merit being treated as a criminal offence. Therefore, I trust that amendment No 16 will be supported by all Members.

It is also important for Members to note that Lord —

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. I note that he emphasised that there should be no criminal proceedings in this or similar cases. I agree with the Member on that. However, does the Member not agree that, given the gravity of the allegations made against Lord Justice Girvan, some alternative civil proceedings could and should have been taken to protect his reputation and standing or, indeed, the reputation and standing of any other judicial figure in a similar situation? Mr Hain's written comments went beyond mere criticism and offence. They tended to verge on challenging the integrity of Lord Justice Girvan, for whom many in the legal profession have a great regard. I think that his standing among his peers is second to none.

Mr Givan: The Member's contribution is important, and I will come to that point. In no way should Members regard the amendment as an opportunity for open season on the judiciary. I agree with comments that elected representatives need to demonstrate self-restraint. There

is a role for us to uphold the independence of the judiciary. However, there is a balance to all that.

The Member, quite rightly, pointed out that there may have been another vehicle for bringing a challenge, if somebody is offended by a statement made about them. I share that view. Lord Justice Sedley, for example, is the most recent judge to sue for libel. His case against 'The Daily Telegraph' was an example of a Lord Justice clearly feeling that criticism had gone beyond what was reasonable, and he was able to sue for libel. I disagree, however, with attaching a criminal offence to criticism of the judiciary. That is inappropriate. It is inappropriate for a taxpayer-funded Attorney General to be able to take cases of that nature against ordinary citizens, Members of the Assembly or, indeed, for that matter, the former Secretary of State, Peter Hain, with whom I have many disagreements about politics. I am not doing this because I have any particular liking for Peter Hain, but it is the principle that I wish to comment on.

It is important to note that, during the debate in the House of Lords, Lord Goldsmith also commented on the issue. He said:

> *"I was the Attorney-General for Northern Ireland for six years and I was never asked to, nor did I, consider that offence in Northern Ireland-or, indeed, in England and Wales, of which I was also Attorney-General. There does not seem to be any need for the offence and I never saw any need for it at the time."*

It is useful to have those statements from a previous Attorney General and someone of such standing as Lord Goldsmith. Lord Carswell, whom I quoted earlier, is a former Chief Justice for Northern Ireland, so I think Members should take on board his comments on the issue. I will quote from Lord Carswell, because these eminent individuals are much more capable than I of articulating what I am trying to convey, and they carry much more weight than I do, certainly within the environs in which they operate in the legal system. Lord Carswell said:

> *"I did not consider for a moment instigating a prosecution or suggesting to the Attorney-General — who was not the noble and learned Lord, Lord Goldsmith, but a predecessor — that a prosecution should be bought. There were deeply scandalous assertions in a certain newspaper that I had come to the conclusions I had reached in criminal trials on the instructions of the Government, more or less, without saying it, as their cat's paw. I was deeply offended and I deeply resented it. I was scandalised, but not for one moment would I have considered asking the Attorney-General whether he would consider bringing contempt proceedings — or, rather, a scandalising prosecution ... it is not necessary in modern conditions; not necessary for a sophisticated society; and not necessary for judges who have to have the hardihood to put up with comments which sometimes may be unfair, badly based and just plain vulgar rudeness. However, that is part of what they have to do: they have to shrug their shoulders and get on with it. It is for that reason that, although I was very cross at the time about it, I certainly did not invoke the criminal law."*

Lord Carswell's opinion of how the case to do with Peter Hain was handled by the Attorney General and the judiciary in Northern Ireland is pretty devastating.

I will pick up on some other quotes. During the debate, Lord Pannick and a number of Members intimated their unease that Northern Ireland was not moving on the issue. Lord Pannick made the point that he was disappointed that Northern Ireland was not going to move on it — I think it was in the debate of 10 December — and he made the following commentary on that:

> *"It is ironic that the impetus for this amendment came from the Peter Hain case in Northern Ireland, and now the anachronistic law that led to that case is to be abolished in England and Wales but not in Northern Ireland."*

He makes a valid point. How absurd would it be, given that the case emanated from Northern Ireland, if they abolished the offence in England and Wales but it is retained in Northern Ireland? That would be simply absurd, and it is therefore important that we move to deal with this amendment.

Lord Lester of Herne Hill said:

> *"Even though the amendment springs from a problem that arose in Northern Ireland, I am doubtful as to whether the Northern Ireland Government will agree to bring their common law into line with what we are doing in England and Wales."*

Maybe he was right in that respect — that the Executive had not been looking at the issue and the Minister had not brought it to the Executive's attention — but the Justice Committee of this place has decided to take action in respect of that. So, in response to Lord Pannick and Lord Lester of Herne Hill, I say that I appreciate their interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland and they can be assured that this Assembly has decided to ensure that Northern Ireland is not left in the dark ages when it comes to this offence.

12.15 pm

It is important that Members recognise that the actions that resulted from this case have a chilling effect on the citizen's ability to pass comment on judicial decisions. I certainly recognise that. I know that many in this place are certainly no shrinking violets when it comes to expressing their opinions, and I would not for one moment think that Members of this place would shirk their responsibilities, where criticism is merited, to pass judgement on judicial decisions. Indeed, I have done so. I was critical of the sentence awarded to one of the killers of Constable Carroll, a sentence handed down by Lord Justice Girvan. That sentence has now been referred, and I trust that that matter will be dealt with, as the Director of Public Prosecutions now deals with that case.

Devolution of justice is new to Northern Ireland, and Members are seeking to tread carefully on this issue. We are seeking to build relationships. In that respect, I commend the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, in all this. I have found him always to be amenable. He has offered to come to the Committee for Justice, which will be the first occasion on which a Lord Chief Justice has been prepared to engage with this place on judicial matters beyond his scope as chairman of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission. We will be able to engage with him on judicial matters, which is a very welcome development. I want to encourage Sir Declan

Morgan to continue to bring the judiciary forward with him. It is important that that work continues.

The Lord Chief Justice, in a speech to the Law Society of Ireland in Dublin on 10 May 2012, commented on this issue. He gave a lecture on the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 and on how it has given the judiciary a greater role in the interchange with the legislatures. He said:

> *"The principal purpose of this lecture is to demonstrate that in my jurisdiction the incorporation of significant elements of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law has caused a change in the relationship between the judiciary, the executive and the legislature."*

He went on to say:

> *"In carrying out the task of securing equilibrium we must all remember that our principal objective is to secure public confidence in the administration of justice."*

He continued:

> *"It also means that an independent judiciary is entitled to expect its position to be respected and secured by Ministers and legislators, but must itself show proper respect for the role which others play in our justice system."*

I support that comment. The independent judiciary has the right to require that legislators and the executive uphold the right to judicial independence. However, let me make it very clear: this place has primacy. We set the law, and we make the law. Judges make their decisions within the legal framework that we set as the elected representatives, as the people ask us to do. We will uphold the right of the judiciary to take those decisions within the legal framework that is established by this place, which has primacy in all this. It is important that we show respect in the way in which we conduct ourselves with the judiciary. I agree with that.

I will conclude this part of my speech on this group of amendments by bringing Members' attention once again to the Lord Chief Justice's speech. He said:

> *"The judiciary, as I often say, is independent, but it is not isolated. We participate and we listen willingly to the other voices in the conversation. For my part, I will do all that I can to ensure that the difficult issues we face as we establish our devolved justice institutions are determined in an atmosphere of mutual respect. At the end of the day, we are all working towards the same goal of ensuring our justice system has the full and deserved confidence of the public."*

I agree with that quote from the Lord Chief Justice. Let me conclude on this point by quoting Lord Pannick as he concluded his speech in the debate in the House of Lords:

> *"As Justice Albie Sachs said on this subject in a judgment in the Constitutional Court of South Africa in 2001, respect for the courts will be all the stronger, 'to the degree that it is earned, rather than to the extent that it is commanded'."*

I urge Members to support the Committee on the amendment. We tabled it to deal with this issue effectively and conclusively.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee, I turn to amendment Nos 14 and 15, both of which were brought to the Committee by the Department at Committee Stage. The Committee received information in relation to the new clause created by amendment No 14 only a few days before the Committee Stage was completed, which provided virtually no time for the Committee to consider the proposed clause properly. Noting that a legal challenge in an existing case has exposed that the current legislation concerning licence arrangements relating to the release of young offenders convicted of certain serious crimes is unlikely to be compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights, the Committee briefly considered the Department's proposed provision. Given that the principal test under the new arrangements will be the protection of the public, the Committee is content to support that amendment.

As the Minister has outlined, amendment No 15 is required to address an omission with regard to the planned registered intermediary scheme and the issuing and withdrawal of statutory notices in relation to the examination of vulnerable defendants through an intermediary. The Committee noted that the Department considers it unlikely that the power to suspend the scheme will need to be exercised but it is prudent to have the safeguard in place. The Committee is content to support the inclusion of the new clause through amendment No 15.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendments tabled by the Minister and those on scandalising the court tabled by the Committee Chair. I want to say a few words on scandalising the court. The Minister has said that he spurned the opportunity to allow Westminster to legislate on the matter. That is a very good principle and perhaps one that we will follow in future. The Chair said, in relation to the Assembly, that:

> *"We set the law, and we make the law."*

It is interesting that, not so long ago, we were criticised for not supporting a legislative consent motion on the National Crime Agency (NCA). Perhaps if we all —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will give way, certainly.

Mr Ford: While the Member definitely makes a good political point, he needs to acknowledge that there is a difference between Westminster legislation that deals with UK-wide matters that impinge on Northern Ireland and an issue that lies solely with this House. The issue of scandalising the court is the latter, and that is why I was so determined that we would not consider Westminster legislating for us.

Mr McCartney: I will quote the Chair again:

> *"We set the law, and we make the law."*

Let that be our guiding principle.

The Chair said that he did not often find himself agreeing with Peter Hain. I want to be very careful here. Peter Hain said that a judge was "off his rocker". At that, I will — what would they say in court, Alban? — rest my case. I do not want to make any further comment on that. The reason why we support the repeal of this legislation is that we believe that there is already sufficient legislative protection

in place for anybody in public office who feels that their integrity or the role that they play in the judiciary or another public office is being attacked.

I followed the commentary on the issue, and it was interesting that a lot of people at Westminster, in particular, seemed to get very upset about this. However, they missed an aspect of it in some regards. The Attorney General addressed that at the Committee and in some of his public commentary. Peter Hain did not just say that a particular judge was off his rocker; he went on to say something else in his role as British Secretary of State. Indeed, the reason why he said that the judge was off his rocker is that he lost a case against him. It is some criterion if you are part of a process to appoint somebody to the higher levels of the judiciary and, having lost a case against them and said that they are off their rocker, you can then say, "I will not let you become a High Court judge". There might be many people working in the judicial process who are saying today, "I hope that Members of the Assembly are never put in a position where they can do that". That was the essence of the case, as well. That needed to be there, because Peter Hain should not have said that. He could have said the judge was off his rocker or stupid in the decision he made, but he should not have alluded to the fact that, if he had had his way, he would have prevented somebody going into public office simply because he lost a case against him. That is not a standard that we should allow to prevail.

The Chair spoke about this, and Albie Sachs is an exemplary person to set the standard. Whatever respect people have for the judicial process, it should be earned and not commanded. I agree with that. In Committee, we said, particularly when the Minister came around that time, that independence is one thing as a principle but it does not free any person, be it a judge or anybody else, from criticism of what they do. As I said in Committee, people have raised their voice against judicial decisions — they may not have described people who then became Lord Chief Justice in another jurisdiction as "off their rocker", but what they said was that they were wrong — and they were proved, eventually, to be right. When we had this discussion before, Tom Elliott, I think, accused us of not supporting the rule of law because we might question a judicial system or a police decision. As I pointed out to him then, the rule of law is not absolute either. It does not stand apart from the right of people to say that it is wrong. If you do not say that it is wrong, you end up with injustice being heaped upon injustice.

So, although we agree that this legislation is archaic and out of date, the Attorney General said clearly that Peter Hain corrected what he had said and, in essence, changed the sense of what he had said. He may still think that Lord Chief Justice Girvan is off his rocker — he may think all those things — but I think he accepted that, when you are in high office, you cannot hold against a judicial figure the fact that you lost a case and use it as an impediment to him or her progressing their career. That was the core of the message, and it was missed by all the great and the good in Westminster. Sometimes, having "Lord" or "Lord Chief Justice" in front of your name does not make you impeccable. There are many Lord Chief Justices who were in charge of tribunals and judges in charge of cases in England who became the Lord Chief Justice about whom many, many people said that they were rewarded by people like the British Prime Minister. So, the British Prime Minister may have got a laugh or two in Westminster when Mr Hain made his comments, but British Prime Ministers are not beyond reproach either.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr Speaker: Yesterday, I raised the issue of Members not being in their place during Question Time, especially Members who have their name on the Order Paper for a question. One Member, Caitríona Ruane, has come through my door to apologise. Thus far, I have had nobody else. We know which Members were not in their place yesterday, and there is still time for Members either to come to this House and apologise or come through my office door and apologise. I will take confessions, wherever they may be.

Mr A Maginness: Especially during Lent.

Mr Speaker: Yes, during any time, whether in my office or here in the Chamber.

Let us move on to questions to the Education Minister. Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Education

Woodlands Language Unit

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for the proposed relocation of Woodlands speech and language unit to three separate primary schools. *(AQO 3427/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Article 7 of the Education Order 1996 provides that children with special educational needs will be educated in mainstream schools. That also applies to children who have statements of special educational needs, unless that is incompatible with a parent's wishes or with the provision of efficient education for other children.

All education and library boards and schools have a duty to comply with that legislation. The Western Education and Library Board has, therefore, developed a policy that requires such facilities to be located at mainstream schools. In line with its policy, the Western Education and Library Board had been in discussions with the board of governors of Belmont House Special School about the relocation and extension of the current provision.

The proposal is to relocate and increase the four speech and language classes to six units at three mainstream primary school locations in both the controlled and maintained sectors. Following consultation with parents and other directly affected parties, the board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools have now brought forward development proposals to support that intent. Copies of the proposal can be viewed on the Western Board's website. Those development proposals were published in the week beginning 21 January 2013 and are, therefore, in the statutory two-month period during which any interested party may make their views known to the Department.

I have accepted an invitation to visit the unit during the consultation period. Once the consultation has ended, I will take account of all the issues and then make a decision on the proposals based on what I believe is in the best educational interests of the children concerned.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. We have been told by parents and staff that this will be an extremely traumatic move for many pupils, many of whom have a high level of need. Can the Minister outline the perceived benefit for those kids if they are moved into three separate primary schools, given that so many relationships and so much experience has been built up in that one unit?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his supplementary. I am in a somewhat difficult position when answering questions on this matter at this time, because I am the adjudicator in the case. I am involved in a statutory process, and I have to adhere to all the legislation. I am involved in a consultation process and have not come to any conclusions on the matter.

I will visit the school in a number of weeks to talk to the parents, teachers and pupils directly and to listen to their experiences. When I have gathered all the other consultation responses, I will make an informed decision. I understand that the Member has the right to raise the matter during Question Time, but, as a Minister, I am in a somewhat difficult position in giving detailed answers to questions posed at this time.

Mr Storey: I appreciate what the Minister says about being able to answer specific questions on this case. Special needs provision that historically has been in the controlled sector is being divided up into other sectors, and that is setting a bad precedent. Will he give this House an assurance that, if we move towards any new structures under the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), the special needs provision that has been in the controlled sector will still be provided in the controlled sector?

Mr O'Dowd: Again, the Member invites me to respond to specifics on the issue, and I cannot do that. I will take into consideration all the matters pertinent to the case before I make a decision. Part of that decision-making process will be not only about whether the school should close but where the children will be dispersed to and what the mechanisms and management types of those schools will be should dispersion take place. I will take into account all of those matters.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I do not want the Minister to repeat himself, as he has gone some way to answer my supplementary. Given the significant concerns among the parents and, indeed, the pupils, will the Minister, when he has considered all of the concerns, come back and inform the House of the outcome?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that I will take into consideration the issues raised with me by all respondents to the consultation, particularly the parents and pupils affected. The usual process for an announcement on a development proposal is not to make a statement to the House but to make a written proclamation of what has been decided. First to receive that will be the school, parents and pupils, and it will then be made public.

Rural Primary Schools

2. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Education how small rural primary schools will be protected in light of the review of the common funding formula recommended by Sir Robert Salisbury. *(AQO 3428/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Last summer, I appointed Sir Robert Salisbury to carry out a completely independent review of the common funding scheme. I received his report last month, and I am now considering its findings and recommendations in depth.

The review has raised concerns that small schools support is currently provided to all small schools, irrespective of circumstances or location. In the current financial year, £29 million was distributed via the small schools support factor in the current common funding formula. The small schools support factor allocates a tapered lump sum to all primary schools with fewer than 300 pupils and post-primary schools with fewer than 550 pupils.

The Salisbury report recommends the development of a small schools policy, whereby strategically necessary small schools, most likely to be small rural primary schools, would be funded outside the formula to ensure that they have sufficient funds to meet their needs. I will assess the impact of this recommendation, along with the others in the report, very carefully to inform my proposals for change, which I intend to submit later in the year. These will, of course, be subject to public consultation.

I reiterate that schools will not be closed simply because they fall below a threshold. Where it can be demonstrated that a small school is needed and can provide the appropriate quality of education, it should be retained and supported.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister tell us whether he still accepts the criterion set out by the Bain report that 105 is the appropriate number of pupils for a sustainable rural primary school?

Mr O'Dowd: I have always said that it is not a numbers game on either side of the argument, whether the numbers meet the sustainable schools criteria or fall below them. There are six factors to be taken into account when assessing whether a school is viable into the future, and all of those will be taken into account in making any decisions on small schools.

The Salisbury report calls on my Department to bring forward a policy on funding for small schools and the identification of small schools. The Member will note that the current funding formula does not match the sustainable schools funding formula. For instance, all primary schools with fewer than 300 pupils receive a small schools grant, and all post-primary schools with fewer than 550 pupils receive that grant. Those figures do not match those in the sustainable schools policy. However, I emphasise again that it is not a numbers game.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaimm buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Will the Minister outline the ways in which the revised common funding formula will help to tackle educational disadvantage in all communities, whether rural or urban?

Mr O'Dowd: One of the main drivers behind my commissioning of the Salisbury review was to ensure that we are targeting social need, and that was stated in the review's terms of reference. All the evidence shows, as the Audit Office report showed again this morning, that educational underattainment exists largely in communities that suffer social deprivation. Therefore, I want to ensure that the Department directs its finances to the schools that service the communities that suffer most from socio-economic deprivation.

The Salisbury report has made a number of recommendations on how we can do that. I am considering those along with all of the other recommendations because I want to ensure that my Department's budget is used to create a world-class education system and tackle educational underachievement. If we are to do that, we have to back up our policies with our finances.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Parents of primary-school children are very concerned, especially after the Bain report on school numbers and now the Salisbury report on funding. Has the Minister looked at what the timing will be when he comes back with his proposals on area planning so that we can stop frightening parents and produce something solid at the end?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not accept this terminology of frightened parents, etc. Of course, I am glad to say that parents take a keen interest in their children's education and in the schools estate. However, I am of the view that the majority of people realise that we have an unsustainable schools estate and that, if we are to use our limited resources properly, we should use them for sustainable schools that are properly planned and able to provide a modern education system for children. So, I do not accept some of the Member's terminology.

I hope to be in a position to make a statement to the Assembly next week on post-primary area plans. As a part of that statement, I will outline my way forward for primary-school area plans.

Education and Skills Authority

3. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Education to outline the projected annual budget of the proposed Education and Skills Authority. *(AQO 3429/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: It is expected that the projected annual budget for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will largely be the sum of the budgets of the existing eight arm's-length bodies that will transfer to ESA. Those are: the five education and library boards; the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); the staff commission; and the Youth Council. The budget in 2012-13 for those eight bodies was £1·476 billion resource and £58 million capital.

In addition, the Department currently carries out the role of funding authority for voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools. That function and some other operational duties that the Department carries out, such as capital funding for the voluntary maintained schools, will also transfer to ESA, along with any associated resources.

Work is ongoing to establish the level of funding for ESA, but, at this stage, a high-level estimate of the annual budget is somewhere in the region of £1·8 billion resource and £0·2 billion capital. That is based on the budget that is currently available for education in 2014-15.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for that response. ESA is meant to be about saving money and being more efficient, but it will effectively become possibly the largest quango in Europe. Will the Minister detail exactly when he will bring the business case for ESA to the Department of Finance

and Personnel so that the true scale of the cost will be known?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not accept the Member's description of ESA, and I note his party's stated opposition to it, although I am not absolutely clear what that opposition is based on. I suspect that it is more political than educational. If it is political, as I suspect, his party could be in danger of damaging our society's educational potential. I have yet to hear a rational argument why his party is opposed to ESA.

It will not be the largest quango in Europe or anywhere near that size. In fact, I question whether ESA meets the definition of a quango, considering that it is democratically accountable to my Department and the Executive.

On the question of when the business case will come forward, my Department is currently working on it and it will be presented in due course.

Mr Campbell: The Minister previously outlined a number of administrative savings that are ongoing and that have been ongoing in recent years. Does he envisage further savings if and when ESA is established?

Mr O'Dowd: Continued savings will be a matter for the ESA board and will also depend on what the education budget looks like at that time. However, it is expected that the establishment of ESA will initially save around £25 million a year on professional support for schools, as we will have an amalgamated service. The rationalisation of education administration under ESA will help to deliver £15 million of savings made a year from the administration and management costs of the Department of Education's arm's-length bodies.

The savings issue is vital, but the main driver behind ESA is to ensure that we have an educational body that will deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose education service for the communities that it serves. The education boards are outdated. That in no way undermines the good work that their officers and board members carried out, but our current management system is outdated. ESA's function is to modernise that and deliver an effective, efficient education service to the people it serves.

2.15 pm

Mr Dallat: I have listened very carefully to the Minister's replies so far. I am sure that he is aware that there was another publication from the Audit Office on literacy and numeracy today. Will the Minister assure the House that, once and for all, ESA will put an end to the affront of 9,000 children a year leaving school without the ability to read and write?

Mr O'Dowd: The report does not state that 9,000 children are leaving school without the ability to read and write. It states that there are 9,000 children whose numeracy and literacy skills are not what they should be.

Will the Member, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, assure me that he will give the report a fair hearing? I note from reading the papers today that he has already made judgement on it without even a hearing at the Public Accounts Committee. As Minister, I expect that the Public Accounts Committee will give the Audit Office report a fair hearing. I welcome the Audit Office report; however, it does not tell us anything that we did not already know. No Member of the House should be surprised by the findings of the Audit Office report.

My party has been shouting from the hilltops for years about the fact that we do not have a world-class education system, while others were shouting back that we had, and telling us, "If it's not broke, don't fix it." We were saying that it desperately needs to be fixed. The Audit Office report highlights the fact that policies are in place that will fix it, but that will take time and further resources. However, I await the Public Accounts Committee's hearing in relation to the Audit Office report, and I will study the recommendations very carefully.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

St Columbanus' College, Bangor

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the newbuild proposals for St Columbanus' College, Bangor, which were agreed by his Department in 2006. *(AQO 3431/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly in the autumn of 2011 entitled 'Putting Pupils First: Shaping Our Future', I set out the challenges associated with the schools estate. One of the major challenges is the need to balance limited capital resources with the large-scale investment needed across the estate. Using the strategic work on area planning, I have moved to ensure that capital investment is targeted to ensure the delivery of modern, fit-for-purpose schools that will be sustainable in the future.

In June 2012, I set out my Department's capital investment plans to invest over £133 million in 18 newbuild projects. On 22 January, I made a further statement to the Assembly, indicating that I proposed to advance in planning 22 school building projects as part of a £220 million investment.

I understand that St Columba's will be disappointed not to be included in my announcement. However, I must stress that this in no way implies that the newbuild proposal at the school will not be considered at a later stage. The reality is that the need for investment across the estate far exceeds the funds available to me through the remainder of this spending review period. I will continue to examine the case for capital investment, including the proposals for schools such as St Columba's, which will be considered alongside other priorities as part of any future capital announcement.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he agree that that school meets the criteria as an effective school and as an outstanding example of shared education in practice? Will he tell us what the governors of the school must do to ensure that St Columbanus is part of the next newbuild round?

Mr O'Dowd: I apologise: it is St Columbanus; I referred to St Columba's during my response.

The reports from the school are all very good. Many schools out there were not included in my capital builds announcement. That is in no way a reflection on the school, its management or the quality of education there. It is a reflection of the fact that we have a very limited capital budget to work with, and I have to have some form of criteria to match my need for builds against the budget.

I have published the criteria that I used on the Department's website. St Columbanus went through that criteria but it did not score as high as other schools. I intend to continue to work with my Executive colleagues to

see whether we can secure capital funding. I am looking at my own budget to see whether further capital funding can be secured, and I want to be in a position to make further announcements in the future.

The chapter is not closed in relation to St Columbanus, or many other schools out there. I assure the Member that I continue to examine all possible ways forward to secure future builds.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answers. I am still unclear, though, after his response to Mr McDonnell, whether he accepts that St Columbanus' requires a newbuild and, if it was not a case of limited finances, would he be in a position to say that that school requires a newbuild should finances become available?

Mr O'Dowd: I accept that St Columbanus requires a newbuild. I also realise that I do not have enough funds to rebuild all the schools that are out there. I require continued work on area planning in that constituency, however, and there has to be work carried out between that education and library board and the Belfast board on the number of pupils leaving Bangor and going back and forth to Belfast, etc. However, I accept here today that St Columbanus is on a lengthy list of other schools that require a newbuild. I also accept that we have to try to secure further funding to build them.

Education Bill: Voluntary Grammar Schools

6. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education what meetings he has held in 2013 with representatives of the voluntary grammar schools concerning the Education Bill. *(AQO 3432/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: I have not met representatives of any voluntary grammar school this year specifically concerning the Education Bill; nor were any requests received by my office to do so. The Education Bill is being considered by the Education Committee. I understand that voluntary grammar schools have made representations to the Committee and I await the Committee's report.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. What steps could the Minister take to allay concerns about potential departmental interference in employment arrangements in that sector?

Mr O'Dowd: Departmental interference in employment arrangements in that sector? May I remind the Member that the Department, on behalf of the people, funds that sector to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds. So, it is not interference; it is called public accountability with regard to employment and funding matters.

The voluntary principle is somewhat of a misnomer in the sense that if schools wanted to go voluntary and fund themselves, I would agree that the Department, the Assembly or anyone else should not interfere in their business. However, as long as any sector is funded from the public purse, in my opinion the Department has a duty to be involved in those schools, although not on a day-to-day basis, a weekly basis or even a monthly basis.

The ESA Bill as set out clause by clause is loyal to the heads of agreement, which allows voluntary grammar schools to continue to be voluntary grammar schools. It does not interfere with the voluntary principle in any way and allows those schools to continue unhindered as they were before.

In relation to employment matters, I think it is important that ESA becomes the single employer. I ask Members to cast their minds back to the dispute over classroom assistants at the start of the last mandate. All Members and parties quite rightly supported classroom assistants in achieving a pay rise. All were very vocal and supportive about that, and a settlement was eventually reached. A number of classroom assistants in voluntary grammar schools have still not received that award.

I use that as an example. However, if we had a single employing authority, that matter would not arise. Everyone would be entitled to the minimum standards of employment and wage control, and that is to the benefit of the employer. We should also be looking to the benefits for the employee in these matters, because every worker in the education sector should be treated the same.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I think I heard him say that it is desirable that ESA should be the ultimate employer for all staff. I know that I am jumping ahead to what is in question 8, but how does he reconcile that with 10(c) of the heads of agreement, which says the opposite?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not believe that there is a contradiction between 10(c) and ESA as the employing authority — 10(c) is there to offer reassurances to the voluntary sector in this matter. I believe that the Bill reflects the heads of agreement quite loyally. ESA is the employing authority. The day-to-day employment schemes of a school are the responsibility of the school. For the want of a better phrase, the hiring and firing of staff remains the responsibility of the school. That is in legislation.

The original question asked whether I could offer reassurances. The question is, do people want to be reassured or is their opposition really to ESA? I cannot reassure someone who does not want to be reassured.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister stated that he did not receive any request from or, indeed, met the voluntary grammar sector. Will he confirm whether he has or has not met with the Catholic maintained sector, either the governing body or trustees?

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm it, because I have had a request to meet them, and I accepted that request. Does the Member want me to write to all the bodies and ask whether they want to meet me? That is not how it works. Representative bodies write to me. They ask the Minister for a meeting.

In my term as Minister, I have met representatives of the voluntary grammar sector on several occasions. I have spoken at conferences where there has been a large representation from the voluntary grammar sector. I have engaged in debate with the sector, and will continue to, around the matter. I have no problem meeting the voluntary grammar sector on this or any other subject. My response clearly states that I have not been asked for a meeting on this matter.

The Education Committee is dealing with the Bill. I am keeping abreast of developments in Committee. There have been several representations, as there should have been, from the voluntary grammar sector to the Education Committee. I await the Education Committee's report. If

the voluntary sector wishes to meet me on the subject, my door is open.

Mr McGimpsey: Is the Minister prepared to accept amendments to the Bill to ensure fair representation for the voluntary grammar sector, the integrated sector and other sectors?

Mr O'Dowd: I find it amazing that, on the day on which the Audit Office report is published — a report that highlights in particular the need in working-class communities for equitable access to education — the only question that I am asked in the Chamber on the ESA Bill is on the needs of the voluntary grammar sector. Is any Member on the opposite Benches ever going to get around to asking this question: how does ESA meet the needs of the working-class Protestant communities? Will any Member on the opposite Benches ever get around to asking that question? I have been debating ESA in the Chamber for several years, even before I was Minister. I have yet to hear a Member from the opposite Benches ask this question: how does ESA meet the needs of Protestant working-class communities?

Mr Allister: Having avoided the question from Mr McGimpsey, will the Minister tell me why it is that the voluntary sector, which educates almost one third of children in the post-primary education field, is denied in his Bill representation in the composition of the board and funding for that sectoral representation and body? Why is that, if he has not got an innate bias towards the sector?

Mr O'Dowd: When the Member is standing at his next flag protest, whipping up the concerns of the Protestant working class, perhaps he can talk to them about educational underachievement. Perhaps he can talk to them about the Audit Office report. Perhaps he can tell them — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mr O'Dowd: Perhaps he can tell them how he is so concerned about the needs of the Protestant working-class community that he has joined the opposite Benches, in that he has not asked a single question about it in his two years in office.

Mr Allister: Answer the question.

Mr O'Dowd: I will answer the question — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: I will answer the question for the Member, because he has never put a question to me yet that I could not answer. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is quite simple. The Member is aware of the heads of agreement document from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister. I was tasked, as Minister of Education, to faithfully produce legislation that matched the heads of agreement. I have faithfully produced legislation that matches the heads of agreement.

Autism: Home Education

7. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Education what opportunities exist for parents of autistic children who wish to implement specific home-based education. *(AQO 3433/11-15)*

Mr O'Dowd: Parents of children of compulsory school age, including parents of children with special educational needs such as autism, may choose to educate their child at home. The parent has a statutory duty to ensure that the education provided is suited to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs that the child may have.

The education and library boards are required to ensure that children in their area are receiving efficient, full-time education that is appropriate to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs. In discharging that duty, the boards ensure that special educational needs provision is matched to the individual needs of each child. That is the case whether it is provided in special schools, in special units attached to mainstream schools, in mainstream schools themselves, at hospital or through home education.

Support provided by the boards may include advice and guidance to the parent on suitable learning materials, training or examination options. The level of training and advisory support will relate to the age and developmental profile of the child or young person. The board will monitor the educational provision in place to ensure that it is effective and that the needs of the child continue to be met.

2.30 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he indicate whether he is prepared to ensure that there is no variance from board to board in supporting home-based education?

Mr O'Dowd: That relates to the debate on the previous question. One of the reasons behind ESA was to bring in equality of provision across all areas of the North to ensure that there was not a postcode lottery, particularly with regard to special educational needs. The Member will be aware that we have gone through the SEN review. My Department is drawing up legislation regarding that matter to ensure that there is equality of provision with regard to special educational needs throughout the North.

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn and transferred to DFP.

Trade Missions

1. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline any planned trade missions involving her Department during 2013. *(AQO 3442/11-15)*

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest Northern Ireland's annual programme of trade exhibitions and missions offers opportunities for companies to visit markets of potential. The January 2013 to March 2014 programme includes over 85 exhibitions and missions to more than 35 countries or regions, including China, Europe, India, Kurdistan, the Middle East, New Zealand, North America, Russia, South Africa and South America.

Mr McDevitt: Thank you, indeed, Mr Speaker. I join the Minister in acknowledging the very good work that Invest Northern Ireland does on behalf of our region. Of course, another component of international trade development is

the development of our tourism market. Can the Minister confirm to the House that her Department supports the global greening initiative, which, this year, will see world landmarks including the pyramids in Egypt and the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro turn green? Can she confirm that the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be able to support, in person, the Rio de Janeiro initiative, when they soon visit Brazil?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Of course, the greening initiative is Tourism Ireland's initiative, and it has been going on for a considerable time. I think that it has got the leaning tower of Pisa and Sydney Opera House involved in the past, and I think they are looking for new and innovative ways of doing it. So, Tourism Ireland will continue to look to that. I am interested in how Tourism Ireland will give standout to Northern Ireland in respect of what it does across the world, particularly in relation to Belfast and the difficulties that have been ongoing. I am interested in how it will address those issues — *[Interruption.]* Sorry?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister is speaking.

Mrs Foster: — particularly in the Great Britain market. I know that Members would like us all to go to Brazil to see the Christ the Redeemer statue, but I am looking at the Great Britain market to see how we can deal with those issues there. That is where my main focus is. Mr Speaker, I think Mr McDevitt would like another question.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister update the House on the Gulfood event that is planned? What does she hope to achieve out of it?

Mrs Foster: The Gulfood event takes place next week, and I am very much looking forward to being part of that trade mission and exhibition. We are taking companies out with us to underline the message about good food coming from Northern Ireland, not only for people in Northern Ireland — goodness knows, that message needs to be reinforced during these days — but in relation to exports across the world. It is an event that is held annually in Dubai, and it is billed as the world's biggest annual food and hospitality show. It covers food, beverages, ingredients, food service and hospitality. It has been running for over 25 years and attracts potential buyers across the Middle East, Africa and south Asia, so we very much look forward to that exhibition and hope that our companies get good feedback from that — if you will pardon the pun.

Mr Kinahan: Can the Minister clarify how successful she has been in getting Northern Ireland representation on to trade missions facilitated by UK Trade and Investment?

Mrs Foster: We are working more closely than ever with UK Trade and Investment, and we very much welcome the support that we now receive from our embassies across the world when we go out there. Now, they are more focused on how they can help businesses in the UK than on matters of diplomacy, as they were, primarily, in the past. We very much welcome that because they can help us with meeting people when we are out in the market and with giving us that little bit of extra knowledge, particularly in relation to culture and customs. So, we very much use the embassy network right across the world. Often, in that embassy network, UKTI sits side by side. We work closely with UKTI, and I would like to see more and more of our companies going on UKTI missions. Obviously, we have our own mission agenda, which I laid out in my substantive answer, but I very much want to encourage companies to be part of UKTI trade missions as well.

Economic Productivity

2. **Mr Elliott** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her Department's target in reducing the productivity gap with the rest of the United Kingdom. *(AQO 3443/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: My Department does not have any explicit target relating to reducing the productivity gap with the rest of the UK.

Mr Elliott: Obviously, the Minister will be aware that there was a target for the productivity gap in the PFG for 2008-2011. How will she monitor the ongoing productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK in the current financial period?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Of course, he is correct to say that we had a target in the previous Programme for Government. We moved away from that because the independent review of economic policy felt that we really needed to look at export-related growth and to prioritise exports as a key driver of economic growth at regional level.

We will monitor very closely, for our own purposes and, indeed, for those of the economic strategy, the productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The Member probably recalls that the target in the Programme for Government 2008-2011 was to halve the private sector productivity gap with the UK average, excluding the greater south-east, by 2015. Of course, we will continue to monitor that.

Mr G Robinson: Can the Minister give an update on recent investment success delivered by Invest Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: We were very pleased to see the announcement last week by Caterpillar of the 200 new jobs that it is creating at Springvale in west Belfast. We are very pleased indeed because that came as a result of interventions that we made after the devastating announcement in September last year of the loss of manufacturing jobs at FG Wilson, now Caterpillar. Sometimes, we have to say to companies, "You may have decided to move these jobs to another area, but is there something else that Northern Ireland can help you with?". We ask them what else we can help them to achieve from their company's point of view. In that respect, we have been able to bring those jobs to Northern Ireland and Belfast. They are shared services jobs. We are facilitating the Caterpillar group right across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. I understand that those jobs will service around 28,000 people in human resources, accountancy and all those issues. We should be proud that we have been able to bring those jobs here to Belfast.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that moves to increase productivity here could really be enhanced if we had access to complete and accurate public accounts and a stronger suite of economic indicators specific to this region?

Mrs Foster: That is why the independent review of economic policy asked us to get those indicators. The

Member will know — at least, I hope that he knows — that those indicators came out about two weeks ago. They will continue to inform us moving forward.

Mr Rogers: Does the Minister agree that the skills gap that employers find when hiring is a serious problem in dealing with low productivity and that a strategy between our schools, colleges and industry is essential if we are really to address that?

Mrs Foster: I suppose that the answer to that question really depends on the sector that the Member is talking about. There are some sectors where, I think, we are meeting employers' skills needs. However, in certain sectors where we have seen quite rapid growth over the past number of years — I am pleased to see that rapid growth — we need to do more on skills. Sometimes, when parents want their children and young people to move into professions such as law or accountancy or, indeed, to become a doctor, I ask them where the jobs will be for our young people. Certainly, in IT, a wide range of jobs is available to young people. Indeed, there seem to be a number of jobs in anything that has a science, technology, engineering and maths background.

I agree with the Member. I have been working closely with the Minister for Employment and Learning on skills, We have looked at skills in the area of renewable energy and heavy manufacturing, and we are looking at the IT sector. However, he is right to say that it goes back to the education sector as well. We need to start looking at younger people much earlier so that we can get the appropriate skills for the economy.

Tourism: Protests and Violence

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what changes are being made to the tourism strategy to deal with any impact on visitor numbers caused by the images of violence and protests in recent weeks that have been shown on news around the world. *(AQO 3444/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: On 23 January 2013, I announced that, following a meeting with representatives of traders, my Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), had agreed to provide financial support to help with the promotion of Belfast city centre. DETI, NITB, Belfast City Council and Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau are working together on a recovery plan for Belfast. The broad elements of the package will include a contribution to the Backin' Belfast marketing campaign, an animation programme for Belfast and broader tourism messaging in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain markets, which will include some co-operative marketing with carriers.

Mr Dallat: I welcome the Minister's answer. Does she agree that the damage done by the recent protests was not confined to Belfast and that action is necessary to counteract the awful damage done right across Northern Ireland and, indeed, beyond?

Mrs Foster: Last year was, of course, a tremendously successful one. The 2012 campaign worked on a number of levels by bringing Northern Ireland to prominence in people's minds for a number of reasons. We had some very successful campaigns, and I was pleased to see the civic pride that people took in Northern Ireland throughout last year. There is no doubt that damage was caused towards the end of last year, and we can all revisit why that was the case. I could stand here and talk about why Belfast City Council felt that it was necessary to proceed with that vote, I could talk about flag protests, but I want to concentrate on 2013 and how we can get back into the market and get that positive civic pride back in Northern Ireland.

Although we have contributed money to Backin' Belfast, which, anecdotally, I understand is working and proving successful, we will, of course, continue to market the whole of Northern Ireland overseas. We are pushing ahead with travel, trade and consumer holiday shows. In our biggest market — GB — we had 40 days of news coverage about Northern Ireland, so we really need to get the message out that Northern Ireland has the lowest crime level in Europe, which I think we should be very proud of. We need to say to people that, if you come to Belfast or anywhere else in Northern Ireland, you will get a very warm welcome, good food and good hospitality. Those are the key messages to get out. So I make this appeal to Members right across the House: please look forward, and, when you talk to potential visitors, say right across the piece that we need them to come to Northern Ireland because it is a good place to work, study, visit and, indeed, do business in.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister talked about promoting the North. Maybe she should consider using "The Gathering" as a promotional tool for that.

When will the final figures for overseas visitors and tourist spend for 2012 be published?

Mrs Foster: I am still waiting for the Republic of Ireland figures. I am not clear in my mind when those will come out, but I think that it will be within the next two months. We will then have a clearer vision of what happened in 2012 all round.

Mr McQuillan: Does the Minister agree that, when we as public representatives make statements to the press, it is important that we do not say things that will further harm the tourist product and pump up tensions?

Mrs Foster: We can sometimes be drawn into situations in which we think that we are speaking only to our constituency and our people here in Northern Ireland. What really brought that home to me was when I spoke to one of our investors from the United States, who had a better knowledge of what was going on on the streets than I did. They pore over all the press cuttings and all the video footage on the internet. So, people need to realise that, when they say anything in here or outside, it will be reported across the world, which, of course, has an impact on Northern Ireland.

2.45 pm

Mr McCarthy: The Minister referred to activities last year. I refer to activities last weekend and the disgraceful scenes when an ordinary, simple football match had to be cancelled because of the activities of some clowns on the street. The Police and Fire Games are just around the corner. With those scenes from last weekend, which were not the fault of footballers or the IFA but other people, is there any — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Let the Member finish.

Mr McCarthy: — indication that the sportspeople who are due to come here will still come?

Mrs Foster: I made a plea that we watch our language, and then the Member gets up and calls some people "clowns". I do not think that it is helpful at all to refer to people as "clowns".

We had a very successful launch, which the CAL Minister and I attended along with the Mayor of Belfast. The figure for accommodation for the World Police and Fire Games has passed the £2 million mark, which I very much welcome. Some competitors from the previous games were over, and, frankly, they had a very good time across Northern Ireland. They visited Fermanagh, the Mountains of Mourne, the north coast, and, of course, they were in Belfast. They were singing the praises of this place as a destination. So, that is the sort of positive message that we want to send out. I hope to welcome, along with the rest of the Assembly, World Police and Fire Games members when they come here in August. I know that they will have a great time and a great games as well.

City of Culture 2013: Marketing Fund

4. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the marketing fund being supplied to aid Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013. *(AQO 3445/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland are liaising closely with Derry City Council and the Culture Company to develop aligned marketing and communications plans going forward. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's spring marketing campaign promoting short breaks in the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland markets launched on Monday 28 January 2013, and the 30-second TV advert has a strong focus on Londonderry as the UK City of Culture 2013. A bespoke Londonderry 10-second edit has been airing from Monday 4 February 2013. Tourism Ireland is implementing a comprehensive programme of promotional activity to highlight Londonderry as the UK City of Culture 2013 in Great Britain and overseas.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for her answer and for all her Department's work to date in this regard. We fully support the Backin' Belfast campaign, but, given that Derry City Council has had a business case in for the past number of months looking for help and support with marketing for the City of Culture, will her Department engage fully with Derry City Council to try to ensure that we have the biggest available marketing budget for what is the biggest event in 2013?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The Member will, of course, know that it is not just about my Department. We have been working very closely with the city council and the Culture Company on the marketing and communications plan. Under the new Executive advertising guidelines, I have to obtain permission for any marketing and communications campaigns in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland market. There is a proposal for a bespoke marketing campaign for the UK City of Culture, and OFMDFM is considering that, so I am hopeful that a decision will be taken in the very near future.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that update. I am aware that a meeting is due to take place with her Department next week about the issue. Will she give us a timeline for the release of the £1·3 million that was bid for in the iON marketing plan? Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Foster: I hope to be in a position to have a decision on the money connected with my Department — I understand that it is £400,000 — by the end of this week.

Mr Campbell: The Minister may be aware of the series of meetings and discussions that have taken place with senior officials at the Culture Company and officials of the city council to ensure that there is a broad balance in the UK City of Culture events to which people of all communities and none can come. Does she support that drive and objective, and will she ensure, in so far as her Department's input can be ascertained, that that continues to be the case?

Mrs Foster: Certainly, that is my hope. Officials are fully aware of that. I have been saying right across the piece since we started to look at this tremendous initiative, which will bring much added value to the region — not just this year; it will leave a long-term legacy, not least because it is the first UK City of Culture — that it is an opportunity for the city to really provide a benchmark for everything that comes after it. Given that this is Northern Ireland, there needs to be buy-in from all sectors. I was pleased to be in Londonderry on Friday, and I met some of the residents of Nelson Drive estate. They are holding a celebration in July, and they had their launch on Saturday evening. I wish them well, and I hope that all the communities get involved in what will be a tremendous year for the city.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Food Prices

6. **Mr Copeland** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to address rising food costs as outlined in a recent report by the Consumer Council. *(AQO 3447/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland is part of a highly complex and integrated global food supply chain. We are not unique in that the food prices charged in our shops are influenced by a wide range of factors beyond our control. Food bills are increasing at a time when the spending ability of households in Northern Ireland is coming under increasing pressure. The 50% drop in farm incomes in the past year is a clear indication of the pressures being placed on household budgets. However, there are factors that we can seek to influence when it comes to food prices. The major retailers have an important role to play in that regard because they occupy a crucial position at the top of the food supply chain in Northern Ireland. I encourage them to engage proactively and positively about pricing with producers and processors.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for her answer. She indicated that she is aware that the cost of grocery shopping is a major concern. She may also be aware of the Consumer Council's proposed recommendations on food prices, pricing policies and the balance of special offers. Will the Minister indicate any level of work that she feels she will be able to undertake to implement specific recommendations?

Mrs Foster: I know that the Member has read the Consumer Council's report on the rising cost of food, but perhaps it is not a good time to talk about the issue. One of

the difficulties for many of our food producers in Northern Ireland is the fact that they have been heavily pressurised by retailers to produce cheaper food. The farmers are not getting the benefit of that; the people who get the benefit are the retailers. That is why I say very clearly that there is a need for us to engage — I intend to do that after things have settled and the current difficulties have passed — so that we can have a real conversation about the price of food. Many food processors feel that they are coming under increasing pressure to deliver cheap food, as a result of which we have had some difficulties in the immediate past.

I take the Member's point, particularly the fact that consumers have less money now than perhaps a number of years ago. However, Northern Ireland food is very good for you. It is traceable. We should encourage retailers to make sure that they stock good, traceable food so that we know its heritage and history. I take the point about the cost of food, but there is no such thing as cheap food.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her reply. In some respects, she has answered the question that I was going to ask. Although the issue of rising food costs is very pertinent to many families, the issue of food contamination is causing grave concern. In light of the comments that she has made, will she assure the House that her Department and others that have responsibility for this issue will continue to ensure that we promote Northern Ireland home-grown produce, which is —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member finish?

Mr Storey: — safe to eat, and that she will support every effort to ensure that that continues to be the case?

Mrs Foster: I will support every effort to continue to make sure that that is the case. Actually, this morning, I spent some time with the Flavour of Tyrone Good Food Circle in Dungannon, where they were promoting good food. I have to say that some of the good food was a little too good at 10.00 am.

The horse meat contamination story has not been a good one. Large retailers have a crucial role to play in restoring consumer confidence. When consumers buy a meat product, they expect to get the meat product that was advertised. We need to engage in a meaningful way with the retailers and make sure that we get that message across.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers so far. How will the Department work with the EU to bring forward its consumer agenda 2014-2020 to the North of Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I am sorry; I am not aware of that policy at all.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her previous answers. Has the Minister already met the Consumer Council in relation to its report on the cost of food? If she has not, has she any plans to do so in the immediate future?

Mrs Foster: No, I have not met the Consumer Council yet. Indeed, I am not sure whether there is a request in to meet me. If there is, it will be dealt with in the usual fashion. However, I have not had the opportunity to speak with the Consumer Council as yet.

Programme for Government: Renewable Energy

7. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made in meeting the Programme for Government targets for renewable electricity and heat. *(AQO 3448/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The 12% by 2012 target for electricity generation from renewable sources has been exceeded. At the end of January 2013, the rolling average for the financial year to date was actually 13·6%. The target for renewable heat is 4% by 2015, from a baseline of 1·7%. Good progress has been made towards encouraging renewable heat through the introduction of the Northern Ireland renewable heat incentive for non-domestic installations in November 2012 and the premium payment scheme for domestic installations in May 2012.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Is the Minister aware of Kirklees Council's warm zone scheme? The flip side of what she has talked about in terms of renewable energy, of course, is saving energy and heat. That council carried out a project over a three-year period that involved 165,000 homes, and it has been evaluated as an excellent project for saving electricity and heat. If she knows about that scheme, will she support it —

Mr Speaker: Time.

Mr G Kelly: — and, with other Ministers, bring it to the Executive?

Mrs Foster: I am sorry; I did not quite catch the name of the area.

Mr G Kelly: Kirklees Council.

Mrs Foster: Yes, I am aware of Kirklees. We had the debate yesterday about sustainable energy and, as well as renewable energy, one of the key elements of sustainability is energy efficiency. Therefore, I welcome any move to help with energy efficiency. Indeed, the Energy Bill that will come to the Floor of the House will introduce an energy efficiency obligation to deal with such matters. One of the key issues for us is to use energy in the most efficient manner.

Invest NI: Vacant Land

8. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to utilise vacant land held by Invest NI in South Antrim. *(AQO 3449/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: In the South Antrim constituency, Invest Northern Ireland owns 394 acres of land. The majority of this land is occupied. However, 106 acres remain available at Global Point business park, Hightown industrial estate and Antrim technology park. Invest Northern Ireland land is held in support of economic development, and the agency is currently working with several businesses to develop interests in acquiring land in the area.

Invest Northern Ireland's property is proactively marketed to foreign and indigenous investors. The final decision on location rests solely with investors. It is important to be aware that Invest Northern Ireland operates in the area of property as a result of market failure. As a result, its primary remit is not to maximise occupancy, rental or

profit. Instead, it employs a long-term strategy in respect of its property holdings.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. In relation to the 106 acres at the Global Point site, I was wondering if there had been any communications between the Department for Regional Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment with reference to an extension or the inclusion of park-and-ride facilities at this location?

Mrs Foster: There are not 106 acres at Global Point. The 106 acres figure includes land at Hightown and Antrim. Only 91 acres are at Global Point.

3.00 pm

On the Member's point about DRD, I understand that there are discussions between Invest Northern Ireland and the Members for South Antrim, who are understandably keen to have Global Point dealt with. Indeed, I recall the MP for the area, Mr William McCrea, lobbying me on the matter some time ago. Therefore, it is something that Invest Northern Ireland has at the front of its mind in relation to its property portfolio. I am sure that its chief executive would welcome any meeting with Members for the constituency.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease as we return to the Criminal Justice Bill.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Question Time, the Education Minister asserted that, during his time as Minister, he has heard no representation from this side of the House about working-class Protestants. I put it clearly on the record that the Education Minister has heard about the controlled sector repeatedly from my party, and that is why the controlled sector body has been proposed.

Mr Speaker, will you also ensure that an inaccuracy about working-class boys not attending grammar schools — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have given the Member some leeway. He will know that, as Speaker, I do not get involved in how Ministers answer questions, but the Member now has his comments on the record.

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

Executive Committee Business

Criminal Justice Bill: Consideration Stage

Debate resumed on amendment Nos 14 to 17 and 38 to 41, which amendments were:

New Clause

No 14: After clause 7 insert

"Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

7A.—(1) In Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (child convicted of serious offence) for "notwithstanding any other provisions of this Order" substitute "subject to Articles 46 to 46B".

(2) In Article 45 of that Order after paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) Where a court passes a sentence under paragraph (2), the court shall specify such part of the sentence as the court considers appropriate as the relevant part of the sentence for the purposes of Article 46 (release on licence).".

(3) For Article 46 of that Order substitute—

"Release on licence

46.—(1) In this Article—

(a) "P" means a person detained under Article 45(2);

(b) "the Commissioners" means the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;

(c) "the Department" means the Department of Justice; and

(d) references to the relevant part of P's sentence are references to the part of P's sentence specified as such under Article 45(2A).

(2) As soon as—

(a) P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, and

(b) the Commissioners have directed P's release under this Article,

the Department shall release P on licence.

(3) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (2) with respect to P unless—

(a) the Department has referred P's case to the Commissioners; and

(b) the Commissioners are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(4) P may require the Department to refer P's case to the Commissioners at any time—

(a) after P has served the relevant part of P's sentence; and

(b) where there has been a previous reference of P's case to the Commissioners under paragraph (3) or Article

46B(4), after the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the disposal of that reference.

(5) In determining for the purposes of this Article whether P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, no account shall be taken of any time during which P was unlawfully at large, unless the Department otherwise directs.

(6) The Department may at any time release P on licence if it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist which justify P's release on compassionate grounds.

(7) Before releasing P under paragraph (6), the Department shall consult the Commissioners, unless the circumstances are such as to render such consultation impracticable.

(8) Nothing in this Article requires the Department to release a person in respect of a sentence under Article 45(2) at any time when that person is liable to be detained in respect of any other sentence.

Duration and conditions of licences under Article 46

46A.—(1) Where a person is released on licence under Article 46, the licence shall, unless previously revoked under Article 46B, remain in force until the expiry of the period for which the person was sentenced to be detained.

(2) A person released on licence under Article 46 shall comply with such conditions as may for the time being be specified in the licence (which may include on release conditions as to supervision by a probation officer).

(3) The Department of Justice shall not, except in accordance with recommendations of the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland—

(a) include a condition in a licence on release,

(b) subsequently insert a condition in a licence, or

(c) vary or cancel any condition in a licence.

Recall of licensees

46B.—(1) In this Article—

"P" means a person who has been released on licence under Article 46;

"the Commissioners" and "the Department" have the meanings given in Article 46(1).

(2) The Department may revoke P's licence and recall P to detention—

(a) if recommended to do so by the Commissioners, or

(b) without such a recommendation, if it appears to the Department that it is expedient in the public interest to recall P before such a recommendation is practicable.

(3) P—

(a) shall, on P's return to detention, be informed of the reasons for the recall and of the right conferred by sub-paragraph (b); and

(b) may make representations in writing to the Department with respect to the recall.

(4) The Department shall refer P's case to the Commissioners.

(5) Where on a reference under paragraph (4) the Commissioners direct P's immediate release on licence under Article 46, the Department shall give effect to the direction.

(6) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (5) unless they are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(7) On the revocation of P's licence, P shall be liable to be detained in pursuance of P's sentence and, if at large, shall be treated as being unlawfully at large.".

(4) In Article 46(3) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (functions of Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland) at the end add "or Articles 46 to 46B of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

(5) Where—

(a) on commencement a person is detained in pursuance of a sentence under Article 45(2) of the 1998 Order, and

(b) the Department, after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge if available, certifies its opinion that, if the amendments made by this section had been in operation at the time when that person was sentenced, the court by which that person was sentenced would have specified as the relevant part of the sentence such part as is specified in the certificate,

Article 46 of the 1998 Order (as substituted) shall apply as if the relevant part of that person's sentence for the purposes of that Article were the part specified in the certificate.

(6) But subsection (5) does not apply (and subsection (7) applies instead) where that person is a person whose licence has been revoked under Article 46(2) of the 1998 Order.

(7) Where this subsection applies, paragraphs (3) to (6) of Article 46B of the 1998 Order have effect as if that person had been recalled to prison under paragraph (2) of that Article on commencement.

(8) Articles 46A and 46B of the 1998 Order apply to an existing licensee as they apply to a person who is released on licence under Article 46 of that Order (as substituted).

(9) In this section—

"commencement" means the date on which this section comes into operation;

"existing licensee" means a person who, before commencement, has been discharged on licence under Article 46 of the 1998 Order and whose licence is in force on commencement;

"the 1998 Order" means the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 15: After clause 7 insert

"Examination of accused through intermediary

Examination of accused through intermediary

7B.—(1) In section 12(1) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (which at the passing of this Act is not in operation), the inserted Article 21BA of the Criminal

Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of paragraph (2) insert "Subject to paragraph (2A),".

(3) After paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) A court may not give a direction under paragraph (3) unless—

(a) the court has been notified by the Department of Justice that arrangements for implementing such a direction have been made in relation to that court; and

(b) the notice has not been withdrawn.

(2B) The withdrawal of a notice given to a court under paragraph (2A) does not affect the operation of any direction under paragraph (3) given by that court before the notice is withdrawn."." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 16: After clause 7 insert

"Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as form of contempt of court

7C.—(1) Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law.

(2) That abolition does not prevent proceedings for contempt of court being brought against a person for conduct that immediately before that abolition would have constituted both scandalising the judiciary and some other form of contempt of court." — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

No 17: In clause 9, page 8, line 2, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

"(1) Except as provided by subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (Notification requirements: absence from notified address);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 17: In clause 9, page 8, line 2, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

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(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (Notification requirements: absence from notified address);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 38: In the long title, leave out "and to" and insert "; to". *— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 39: In the long title, at end insert

"; to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 40: In the long title, at end insert

"; and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999".

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 41: In the long title, at end insert

"and to abolish the common law offence of scandalising the judiciary". — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

Mr Elliott: I will speak briefly to the second group of amendments. Amendment No 14 puts what I would call boundaries into place for the releasing on licence of a child convicted of a serious offence. I assume that the proposed new clause to some extent takes powers away from the Minister, powers that he appears quite willing to give up. I believe that it puts in place a better basis for that decision-making process, so I am content with the amendment.

Amendment No 15 concerns the "Examination of accused through intermediary". The detail is quite limited in the Bill, but we got a significant briefing in Committee, and we are again content to accept the amendment.

Amendment No 16 was tabled by the Committee in the name of its Chair. It is important that there be public confidence in the courts and the judicial system. There needs to be an opportunity for the judiciary to come under close scrutiny from everyone: members of the public; elected representatives; and other bodies. That scrutiny could often be a challenge to the courts, the judiciary in general or, in some cases, individual judges, in the same way in which a referee comes under scrutiny from spectators at a football match. That is right and proper, which is not to say that judges get every decision right or wrong.

I do not know how individual judges view the amendment to abolish the law of scandalising the court. However, I would be very surprised if they were opposed to its removal. I hope that judges would not want any personalised protection from comments that may be made about them above and beyond what other members of the public and those in public life are entitled to.

It is vital that judges and the judiciary have an independence that is required for their roles and responsibilities, without being totally protected by criminal legislation. I think that this is putting the judiciary and individual judges on a level footing with the rest of the community and those of us in public life. It allows people the opportunity to openly and freely have their say on what they think about judges and their decisions.

I listened to Mr McCartney, in his earlier contribution, referring to me and what I thought about what his party had said about some aspects. On occasions, I am sure that Mr McCartney and his party have said quite a lot about judges, the judiciary and the law that I would not agree with. Indeed, I am sure that, on occasion, some Sinn Féin members would not have been afraid to even go outside that law to say what they thought.

Mr A Maginness: The SDLP supports the second set of amendments. I will comment as briefly as I can on the matter raised by the Committee about the abolition of the offence of scandalising the court. The Committee has again shown itself to be exercising its functions and its power in an innovative way in the Assembly. I pay tribute to the Chair for leading the Committee in that regard on that particular provision. That is to the credit of the Committee, and it is perhaps to the deficit of the Executive at large for not grasping the issue themselves. We are performing a good service on this matter.

The remarks by Mr Hain in his book, which I happen to have here in the Chamber, and which I might refer to, gave rise to this issue. The remarks that he made were very unfortunate, and they were beyond simple criticism of a judge's judgement. We have to take that into consideration, but I think it was wrong to challenge Mr Hain in the manner in which it was proposed through that archaic legislation or law — I am not even quite sure whether it is actual legislation.

To use a criminal sanction was quite definitely wrong, but that does not mean to say that there was no merit in the reaction of the Attorney General, or, indeed, the reaction of the Lord Chief Justice. I will briefly refer to what the Lord Chief Justice said about Mr Hain and his remarks in his book. Sir Declan Morgan said that Mr Hain had made "unwarranted and wholly inappropriate remarks" about a decision made by a Belfast judge. Remember, Mr Hain's comments were not about the judge per se, but about his decision-making. It is very important to take that into consideration.

The fact that Lord Justice Girvan ruled against Mr Hain was very important. That point was raised by Mr McCartney earlier in this debate. Mr Hain seems to have overreacted to the way in which Lord Justice Girvan dealt with the case. He claimed that the decision had been "idiosyncratic" and "high-handed".

The Lord Chief Justice described the comments as having the potential to amount to:

> *"an assault on the wider independence of the judiciary".*

He also said:

> *"There is a statutory obligation on those in ministerial office to uphold judicial independence."*

He went on to conclude:

> *"In this instance however, it is difficult to regard the remarks as anything other than undermining and unhelpful to the administration of justice in Northern Ireland."*

Those are pretty damning remarks by the Lord Chief Justice. Of course, it is a rare thing for the Lord Chief Justice to make public comment, but he did so on this occasion. That showed the extent to which he felt that the administration of justice had, in fact, been compromised.

Of course, Mr Hain was not in office when he wrote that particular book. Nonetheless, it reflected what he thought while he was in office, and to say that he was just making some criticisms of the judge was an underestimate of the damage that Mr Hain caused to the wider administration of justice.

It would be helpful to remind ourselves of what Mr Hain actually said. Remember, this was in the aftermath of an application to judicially review the Secretary of State for the appointment of a victims' commissioner. Mr Hain felt that this political decision should not have been brought before the court whatsoever. In his book, on page 333, Mr Hain said:

> *"The Appeal Court was similarly dismissive of his charges except on a procedural technicality. Having had run-ins with judges during my time as an anti-apartheid protestor, I did wonder whether some history explained the eccentricity of the judge or even whether in common with other high earners he had been unhappy about my reforms of the property tax system which raised rates for larger houses."*

That, I have to say, borders not just on contempt but on undermining the integrity of the judge in that situation.

Mr Hain goes on to say:

> *"It certainly was, when I was invited to confirm the promotion of the said Justice Girvan to become the Right Honourable Lord Girvan in Northern Ireland's Appeal Court."*

He goes on, saying that there was a document that he had to sign:

> *"Pondering the document in my red box at Hillsborough on Christmas Eve, could I in all honesty agree to this when the Lord Justice's legal capabilities seemed so flawed? It was a momentary rather than a serious thought."*

Then he goes on to say:

> *"I knew full well that that would provoke an even greater fuss, and just to be sure, called Charlie Falconer"*

— who was then the Lord Chancellor and was actually on holiday in the Caribbean —

> *"I agree with you, not a wise thing to do, he said, amused. Nevertheless, promoting someone who was going out of his way legally to damage me seemed a novel obligation."*

3.15 pm

That is a very serious statement. If it is not contempt, it certainly borders on contempt. It certainly impinges on the independence of the judiciary. He had it within his gift to promote this judge but decided that he perhaps should not. That is a very serious thing for Mr Hain to admit to. The fact that he did not do it is merciful. Nonetheless, he had it in his mind to do so. If he had not been able to contact Charlie Falconer, who was on holiday in the Caribbean, he might have stopped the promotion. That would have

been extremely unfair. Here would have been a politician actively interfering in the appointment of a judge from one division to another, from the High Court to the Court of Appeal. So this is not a small thing. It is not just simply a matter of a level playing field, in my view. Judges have been —

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. He makes quite an interesting point. However, I assume that a judge who has been treated unfairly in any appointment process has a due process that he can go through in the same way as anybody else who is not appointed or given a promotion, where applicable. I do not see what relevance that has to this amendment.

Mr A Maginness: It is relevant in so far as the amendment arises from a consideration of this situation. The amendment would not arise if this situation had not arisen in the aftermath of the judicial review, which failed to satisfy the Secretary of State at that time. That is the important thing.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Mr Allister: Surely Mr Elliott is quite wrong. The appointment of someone from the High Court to the Court of Appeal is surely a prerogative appointment that would not be subject to the normal reviews and restraints of any other job and promotion therein. Is that not the case?

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful to my learned colleague for his intervention. I think that that is true. It would not be subject to the same rigours as —

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way again. The point that I was trying to make is that having this point in law is not actually helping that case if a criminal charge of scandalising the court can be brought.

Mr A Maginness: I accept your point that this was the wrong way of doing it and that the Attorney General went down the wrong route. The opinion on that is almost unanimous, although I do not think that the Attorney General would agree.

Nonetheless, this matter was very serious. It was dismissed at Westminster by the House of Lords and House of Commons, and the Prime Minister's reaction was dismissive. That was quite wrong. If something similar had happened in England, there probably would have been a much greater reaction on the part of the Prime Minister in dealing with the situation. I do not think that he would have dealt with it in such a dismissive fashion. We were another jurisdiction, and I think that the Prime Minister was able to deal with the situation in such a dismissive fashion because of that. It did not immediately affect the judiciary in England or Wales, so there was an under-reaction in Britain.

I am not certain that everybody read Mr Hain's comments. If they had, I think that they would have been outraged by them. The Lord Chief Justice in this jurisdiction was outraged by them. I was, and I know that other people were, although they did not get the publicity or media coverage that those who criticised the Attorney General got.

Going back to Mr Allister's point, the remarks were not subject to some form of scrutiny. Therefore, what was the judge to do if something was not done by the Attorney General? I think that the only alternative that the learned judge had was to bring an action for libel. I am not so certain that a judge can freely take an action for libel. First of all, my understanding is that he needs the Lord Chief Justice's permission. Secondly, he opens himself up to all sorts of public scrutiny and so forth, which is inappropriate for a judge, because after the trial is over, he has to go on and carry out his public duty. So, it is a bit unfair to expect a judge to simply take the initiative with a libel action. Therefore, there may well be need for some other process to deal with a similar situation.

In conclusion, this was a serious situation. It has brought about the very reasonable amendment that the Committee tabled. I support that, as does my party, but it may well be that we need to look at some mechanism to deal with similar situations in the future. I am not sure how we would deal with it, but it was a serious situation that those at Westminster diminished. I think that we should take a very serious look at it.

Mr Dickson: In this group of amendments, we are looking at the issue of releasing of children who have been convicted of serious offences. Although every criminal offence is regrettable, we are very fortunate that the number of detention orders under article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) Order is very low. However, as the Minister explained, when the orders are issued, it is entirely a matter for him to determine whether a child is released on licence. It is quite clear that that does not comply with the ECHR, and the independent judicial element is essential. For that reason, we are happy to support the amendment.

I listened to the Chair of the Committee and to Mr Maginness in particular, who described the issue of scandalising the court and the particular case that was raised. First of all, I am pleased that the Minister is happy for the House to make a determination on the matter, as that allows me to support the Committee. In those circumstances, we are going to make the right decision on the matter.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr Dickson was enthusiastic at the Committee in his support for this. I trust that, in being given a free vote, he has been able to try to put some of that enthusiasm into the Minister so that the Minister can join with the House in abolishing the offence today.

Mr Dickson: I am sure that the Minister will join me in the Lobby should that be necessary.

Mr Maginness made some very important points, as did the Chair of the Committee, in describing the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Mr Maginness ended on a particularly important point, which, in layperson's terms, is that this should not send out the signal that it is open season on judges. That is probably the most important thing that needs to be said about this. While we may be removing particularly arcane legislation, we are, nevertheless, making it very clear that this House and Northern Ireland has high respect and regard for its judges.

Should our judges not be in a position to protect themselves from public comment that is unwarranted, unreasonable or breaches the law in any way, the matter can be referred back to this House, and we can consider the potential for legislation. While people might find comments offensive, as Mr Maginness has described, or quite funny, it is, nevertheless, inappropriate to take a poke at our judges in that way, and a very clear signal

needs to go out from this House that we do not in any way condone that type of comment about the judiciary. Our judges in Northern Ireland have to take clear and proper independent decisions on very complex areas of the law and matters that are put in front of them. They must and do have the confidence of this House and the public in Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots: It is an interesting debate and interesting legislation, and I welcome and support the amendments.

Scandalising the court is an archaic law that most people did not realise existed until Peter Hain's book came out. Mr Maginness quoted from it quite liberally, but I think that Peter Hain deliberately set out to develop some sensational comments in his book to try to sell it. Using the terminology "off his rocker" to describe one of our most senior judges is wholly inappropriate, but, nonetheless, through his response, the noble lord fell hook, line and sinker for what Mr Hain wanted, which was to create publicity for his book to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of its existence. I have absolutely no doubt that he achieved that goal through that piece of sensationalism.

The Lord Chief Justice initially responded to it, and many people thought that that was where it would rest, because the Lord Chief Justice was very clear in that response. However, the Attorney General was clearly prompted by Lord Chief Justice Girvan to take it somewhat further, and that caused huge controversy, not just here but at Westminster. That brought us to our knowledge of this law and has perhaps drawn to our attention that it is no longer necessary for Northern Ireland.

The Lord Chief Justice made it very clear that it is important that Ministers recognise the independence of judges, and I will come to that in a moment. However, it was somewhat bizarre this afternoon when Mr McCartney, a former hunger striker, placed a shield around Lord Chief Justice Girvan and offered him protection from the evil Peter Hain, who did not really want to appoint him as a judge but was left with no choice.

I can assure Mr McCartney that he does not actually need to offer any of the noble judges protection in this instance, because his party will have no role in appointing judges. Nor, indeed, will any other politician in Northern Ireland. The judges will be appointing the judges, and, as part of the devolution of justice, we as a party saw it as considerably the lesser of two evils: having judges appointing themselves, as opposed to the deputy First Minister having a role in their appointment .

3.30 pm

To that extent, judges in Northern Ireland have a greater degree of independence than in any other part of the UK, and that brings with it a huge, significant and grave responsibility, because the same checks and balances are not in place. Where judges are perceived not to have been paying as much attention to public policy and the legislature as they should, when promotions become available, politicians have absolutely no role in the judge being promoted.

Therefore, judges need to pay a considerable amount of attention and respect to the legislature, and Chief Justice Sir Declan Morgan has recognised that. In fact, in Dublin last year, he talked at length about the importance of equilibrium. He said:

> *"In carrying out the task of securing equilibrium, we must remember that our principal objective is to secure public confidence in the administration of justice. We are all committed to the rule of law ... It also means that the independent judiciary is entitled to expect its position to be respected and secured by Ministers and legislators but must itself show proper respect for the role which others play in our justice system."*

We are playing a role in the justice system today in this House. We are legislating, and due respect should be given to the legislative body — which is this Assembly — by our noble judges in what they do.

It was somewhat striking that, at the weekend, it became apparent that legislation was going to have to be done for a second time at Westminster relating to the deportation of individuals — deportation of criminals — from the United Kingdom. Legislation was passed, and the intent of Parliament was clear, but some judges decided that certain elements of human rights law would actually supersede what was passed at Westminster, and therefore did not give the judgements that the legislature would have expected. In that instance, Parliament is going to have to go and legislate again. Clearly, the equilibrium balance has fallen the wrong way in that instance, because Parliament should not have to go a second time to legislate for something that was very clear was the wishes of the public the first time around.

Very often, we hear judges playing out the human rights arguments and making decisions based upon human rights. Very often, the decisions that are made to ensure the human rights of one party actually deny the human rights of another party. A very clear example is the recent European judgement where a couple who own a guest house —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member to talk on the amendments in this grouping. The discussion should be relevant to it.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will respect your indications. I am talking about the right to criticise judges and their decisions without actually scandalising them. It is not breaking the law. I will follow your guidance on this.

In truth, the judiciary have far greater independence here than elsewhere, and, therefore, that needs to be respected. At the same time, as politicians, we need to show due respect for the judiciary, and we need to be receptive of their judgements and decisions. However, this legislature needs to have the opportunity to pass its legislation and not get to a point at which it is critical of court outcomes.

A huge number of decisions will be taken on social policy, for example. Northern Ireland passes legislation, and it is the Assembly that passes it. I sometimes hear people say, "The noble Lord has said this, and we should therefore follow that." This legislature makes those decisions. Judges do not make legislation. This House makes legislation, and I think that we have to have due respect for that.

Therefore, on scandalising the court, I want to make it absolutely clear that we have to get to the point at which

there is the equilibrium that the Lord Chief Justice has identified. He referred to a conversation that needed to take place. That was back in May 2012. I am not aware of that conversation having taken place. It may have taken place, but I am not aware of the conversation that has taken place to identify where that equilibrium lies. It is absolutely critical that we have that balance, and that that respect is shown to the courts. We should not hold the courts in contempt, because that would be wrong. We should not scandalise them, because that would also be wrong. However, the courts should have the same degree of respect for the decisions made by this House, when those decisions are made in good faith and on behalf of the public.

It is absolutely essential that all of us recognise that, whether you are in the Royal Courts of Justice or, indeed, in this Assembly, subject to Her Majesty, we are all subject to the will of the people. We are here as servants of the people, and courts are servants of the people. The first element of any democracy is justice, and, therefore, the role that courts play is absolutely critical in that.

I want to see and ensure that, although we remove this provision today, we show our courts due courtesy. However, I also want to see that our courts show due respect for this House, and, indeed, for other Houses that pass legislation and that the will of the people is something that is granted and not superseded. When we come to these fine definitions, where one person's human rights are considerably different from those of another, judges need to give a wider view based on the wider view held by the public and ensure that they respect everyone's human rights, not just those of one individual.

Mr Allister: I want to focus on amendment No 16, which has arisen from quite a deep-seated controversy that broke last year over the action of the Attorney General. The Attorney General came in for a lot of criticism about his course of action. Just like a judge, he is not and should not be above criticism, but I think that he is as entitled as any of us to have that criticism be balanced and considered, rather than suffer knee-jerk and imbalanced criticism.

I will approach the matter in this way. If some right-wing extremist had said something extraordinarily offensive about a judge, attacked his personal, judicial and professional integrity, and the Attorney General had acted against that far-right — British National Party or whatever — individual, would the Prime Minister have risen at the Dispatch Box to condemn the Attorney General? Would politicians have been falling over themselves to condemn the Attorney General, or was it simply because it was the well-connected Peter Hain who was drawing the wrath of the Attorney General that we saw that reaction? That is a point worth pondering.

The Attorney General's position was this: he did not evolve the common law; he was put in that position by politicians, effectively, where he had to deal with the situation whereby the common law said that it was a contempt offence to scandalise a judge. Was he to ignore that, turn his back on it and pretend that it did not exist, or was he to address it? This House today will relieve him of that responsibility, because this House today will abrogate the provision in the common law whereby it is a contempt offence to scandalise a judge.

However, that was not the situation this time last year. That was not the situation when this book hit the book stands. The Attorney General was in a position where the law provided — not legislative law but common law and of equal strength in circumstances where there is no legislation — that it was a contempt offence to scandalise a judge. So, he had a judgement to make. He read, as, I suspect most in this House have or should have read, that Mr Peter Hain — it could only come from someone as supercilious and arrogant as Mr Hain — took great offence at being rebuked by the courts of this land and that he took it personally that what was a politically agreed appointment of an Interim Victims' Commissioner was questioned and challenged in the courts, for he — the mighty Mr Hain — is above all that. It is quite clear from the content and tenor of his book that he is not to be challenged. How dare anyone challenge the mighty Mr Hain, who was doing it all in the name of peace? He was serving that greatest of causes, and yet some jumped-up judge dared to take seriously a challenge to his actions and dared to question what the mighty Mr Hain had done. So, when Mr Hain came to write what he calls his memoirs, he had a score or two to settle. Yes, he had some other interesting things to tell us, because when you pick up this book, all sorts of interesting facts come out of it. He had interesting things to tell us about how he bought the DUP by flattery and by threatening to close the Assembly and stop their salaries. There are all sorts of interesting things, but I will not be sidetracked, because you would pull me up, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure.

He certainly had a score to settle with Lord Justice Girvan, and so he gets himself right down into the gutter. That is where he went: right down into the gutter. He said — he inferred — that what motivated Lord Justice Girvan was some personal issue with the fact that Hain had reformed property tax, and that people who lived in big houses did not like it. The shame is on Mr Hain for daring to think and express that.

3.45 pm

I have had run-ins with many judges in court. I know Lord Justice Girvan and there is no more independent-minded man sitting on the bench in Northern Ireland. I have had issues with him, disagreed with judgements and been on the wrong side of his wrath — all of that. However, I can recognise from it that there is no more independent-minded man on the bench than Lord Justice Girvan.

It was shameful and scurrilous to suggest that he may be motivated by something as base as the fact that a politician in the form of Mr Hain had interfered and pushed up his rates — a scandalous suggestion. Then to go on, as Mr Maginness drew to our attention today, to ponder, when it came to the justified promotion of the Lord Justice, that his legal capabilities seemed so flawed. Not satisfied with attacking his personal integrity by suggesting that he would be influenced by something such as a hike in his rates, he was now prepared to attack his professional capability and integrity.

I come back to my first point: if someone on the raving loony right — or left, where Mr Hain used to be — had said that of a judge, and the Attorney General had acted, would he have borne any criticism? I suspect not.

Mr Poots: I appreciate the Member's line of argument. However, if I was to describe the Member in some of the

ways that Mr Hain chose to describe Lord Justice Girvan, the Member may choose to take a case against me for doing so. In that respect, why would we be in a position where we give judges greater protection than other members of the public or, indeed, Members of this House or Government Ministers? Should we put some special blanket of protection around retired Ministers or, indeed, current Ministers? Why should we have that scandalisation just for judges? I take it that the Member is arguing that we do not change this today. In that respect, why would Lord Justice Girvan not be in a similar position as myself or the Member to take someone to court if they slandered or libelled him?

Mr Allister: The Member raises a fair point, although he makes a wrong assumption about my position on this amendment. Just to crystallise that, I think that it is right that we make this amendment but wrong that we leave a vacuum having made the amendment.

Let me expound on that, if I may, and to do it in the context of how the Member raised the point: could not Lord Justice Girvan or any other judge so scandalised simply sue for libel? Yes and no is the answer. Yes, in theory; in practice, very difficult. Who hears his case? One of the other dozen judges who sit with him in the High Court? A judge is in a very delicate, difficult position where he cannot really defend himself in the manner that you, I or anyone else can defend themselves without impinging, I perceive, on the performance of his duties on the bench. A judge sues today for libel, and a colleague hears the case. You can already imagine —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Just let me finish the point.

You can imagine the innuendo that would arise. The judge succeeds in his case, and it is a nudge, nudge, wink, wink situation. Of course, he was always going to succeed. Was one of his colleagues not hearing the case? If the judge fails, where does he then stand as a judge coming into court to preside over the next libel trial? Whether the judge wins or loses, where does he stand as a judge coming into court to preside over the next libel trial? He stands in a very invidious position. That is why I think it too trite to say that he has the same rights as all the rest of us. He might in theory; in practice, it is a very different matter.

That is why I think that there is a bit of a gap, which now needs to be filled. If we are taking away the common law provision, we need to have some hedge of protection to avoid it being open season. Remember this: libel is a useful protection only if you have someone worth suing. If some vagabond worth nothing says something about you, there is no point in suing — no point whatsoever — so it is not just as easy as saying, "Let him sue." The House has to address whether any safety protection is required to stop it being open season through scurrilous remarks of the ilk of those made by Mr Hain.

Mr McCartney: Who would hear the case under current legislation? Would the same points not apply?

Mr Allister: Yes, and that is one of the problems of a small jurisdiction. In Northern Ireland, obviously, the judges and practitioners all know one another. That is one of the consequences of a small jurisdiction. In England and Wales, you could well have judges who have never met and know nothing about one other, and so you might have more obvious scope for the freedom of litigation without the inhibitions that I am talking about. If proceedings had been brought, they would have been, at least initially, determined here, and, quite potentially, could have gone ultimately to the Supreme Court, where at least there would be a degree of remoteness. However, there are certain constraints to a small jurisdiction, and the Member identifies one of them.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Poots: I appreciate where the Member's comments are coming from. My understanding is that Lord Justice Sedley successfully took a case against 'The Daily Telegraph', so this is not something that has not happened before.

I caution that the import of the Member's remarks, if not the intent, is that a judge may be only a little impartial if one of his colleagues brought a case before him. I have no doubt that the judiciary would have acted with total impartiality had Lord Justice Girvan taken a case against Peter Hain and brought it before the courts.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes, if I may deal with this intervention first.

I agree, and my expectation is that the judiciary would have acted impartially. However, that would not stop the proverbial man in the street, whatever way the case turned out, saying that it was a fix. That is ready-made territory for someone to say that.

Yes, a High Court judge in England did successfully sue for libel, but this comes back to the point that Mr McCartney made. That judge sued in a very much larger jurisdiction, where there was not the personal interface between the litigant and the decider, or someone key to the decision-making. So it is a problem and a difficulty. Although the House has been well persuaded that the common law should be abrogated, I think that the House is now leaving a gap. The House needs to think about that.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier, he said that you would not sue a vagabond, because he is a man of no substance. I want to hear him on this. I understood that the whole reason why you would sue is to restore your good name, not to get a bank of money. Although we are not talking about Judge Girvan here, I suspect that judges maybe have enough of that already. I would have thought that the real exercise is to restore their integrity and their good name, not to get a couple of hundred thousand pounds. Is that not right, Mr Allister?

Mr Allister: I am sure that restoring their integrity is the primary goal, but if you sue somebody who has no money, you might get a judgement against them, which you will never enforce, so you do not get any money. However, you are left with your legal bills, which are very substantial. So, in fact, you have to be prepared to say, "I am going to throw x tens of thousands of pounds at this to establish my good name." How many Members would readily do that? Some might; I do not know. It is the realities of that, which, I think, cause us to think that we should be looking at this in terms of, "Yes, we are going to pass amendment No 16". What then, however? Do we simply walk away and forget about it?

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Member for giving way. On that point,

where would you make the differentiation between this jurisdiction and England and Wales, when they are not making any redefinition of it or any hedge around about it? We are following what the other jurisdiction is doing in England and Wales. Indeed, a former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Carswell, has made it clear that he would not want any difference to be made between how judges are treated here and how they are treated in England and Wales. So, how would we make that difference?

Mr Allister: It is a bit of role reversal, because I am usually the one who is more enthusiastic about following what England and Wales want, and the honourable Member is more of an enthusiast for proving the virility of devolution. I think that it is something that the House of Commons should also be addressing. I think that it has an added poignancy in Northern Ireland, because of the very small jurisdiction that we have, but I would like to see it addressed nationally by England and Wales as well. If they do not, I still think that it is something that the House needs to think about and apply some attention to.

Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to give voice to those views. In those circumstances, and with those caveats, I am happy to support amendment No 16 today.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I shall perhaps not dwell on quite where the bulk of the most recent contributions have, but I want to look at the other three amendments in the group.

In my opening remarks, I explained that determinate detention orders under article 45(2), although not often used, provide an important and necessary custodial option for courts that are dealing with those children who commit the most serious offences. The revised provisions, as set out in clause 7A, which replicate the provisions for other similar orders, will ensure that the processes that are used to determine matters of release, licence requirements and recall will be subject to the required level of independent decision-making through the courts and the Parole Commissioners. Importantly, that will mean that the provisions will not only comply with our international treaty obligations but will bring the release, licensing and release processes that are associated with those detention orders fully into the mainstream arrangements for dealing with the management of serious offenders as they move from custody to the community. I believe that that in itself is a worthwhile step forward.

Although I am very grateful for the sort of hint that almost came from Tom Elliott, when he said that perhaps the Minister did not need to talk about this because he was so good, the reality is that, on human rights grounds, it is absolutely necessary that we deal with the current outstanding issue and that we move away from ministerial discretion in this specific area.

I do not know that anyone who contributed to the debate on this group of amendments spoke on proposed new clause 7B, which is a technical amendment on registered intermediary schemes. It is important that we ensure that we have legislative consistency between the provisions that deal with the accused and those that deal with victims and witnesses and ensure that that gives full compliance in order to ensure that there is a proper balance. I welcome the fact that I can assume that Members, by not referring to the issue, are content with the proposal before us. I am grateful for that level of support or, at least, the lack of dissent on the proposals that I have put forward.

4.00 pm

I want to speak briefly — significantly more briefly than others — on amendment No 16. It is clear that there is support in the House for the amendment, which removes the criminal issue of scandalising the court. It was also noticeable that many of the remarks that have been made around the Chamber focused on the difficulties that we are in and the potential need to look at certain other ways to deal with the potential problems that have been highlighted by the Hain case and other issues. On a personal note, when Mr Maginness quoted elements of the book, which got as far as the former Secretary of State consulting Lord Falconer on whether he should go ahead with making a judicial appointment, it highlighted two things: first, the importance of the fact that, as Mr Poots said, politicians in the Assembly are no longer responsible for appointing judges in Northern Ireland, which, I believe, is a good thing; and, secondly, it reminded me of the point last year when I was responsible for appointing a number of new QCs. That was a prerogative decision that lay with me. A number of the names on the list belonged to those who had fought the campaign against the cuts in criminal legal aid, which, as those who were Members of the previous Assembly will remember, were included in the first Justice Bill.

Mr McCartney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: Give me a second. The irony struck me as I was faced with opening my rather cheaper black ministerial box — not an expensive red ministerial box — at home that night. I smiled to myself, and I then complied with my duty. I did not ring Lord Falconer. I did not ring John Larkin either. I will give way.

Mr McCartney: The Minister makes a very interesting point. Did he note that no one seemed to raise an eyebrow when a British Secretary of State, as he was then, phoned the Lord Chancellor to interfere in the judicial process as if it was commonplace?

Mr Ford: I certainly raised an eyebrow when I read the extracts from the book. Unlike Mr Maginness, I have not bothered to get it from the Library.

There are fundamental concerns, which highlight that there is an issue. Although we are content today to remove the criminal offence, there is an issue that needs to be addressed.

I must take slight issue with Mr Maginness. He praised the role of the Committee almost as enthusiastically as the Committee Chairperson. However, he said that the Executive at large were lacking in having failed to act on the issue. I have already been praised by the Deputy Chair of the Committee, so I thank him again and note that I made it clear that we did not want a legislative consent motion for Westminster on this issue and this was the right place to legislate. That was entirely the correct decision. It is also a simple fact that, if Departments legislate, a serious, lengthy consultation period is required. In the face of all of the other issues before the Department, I did not see it as a priority within the timescale in which the Committee was able to act. I did not think that it was legitimate to prioritise that against other issues that we are dealing with, which, frankly, are more likely to come back to us than the potential of scandalising the court arising

again, perhaps in another 50 or 60 years. It is one of the quirks of our legislative process that, while Departments are obliged to go through that lengthy consultation process, Committees can act on a whim, as indeed can private Members. Whether we think that that is the right balance in the way things are done is an issue for another day.

I also noted that Mr Allister referred specifically to the fact that, in dealing with the Hain book, the Attorney General acted in line with his defined role in common law as it stands. We are seeking to remedy that by removing that common law position. Jim Allister and Alban Maginness have highlighted areas where there are issues that we will need to look at again and where we will need to have proper consultation to see whether alternative mechanisms are required in this jurisdiction. We cannot simply leave a vacuum, by removing the legal issue in a criminal prosecution but not deal with the potential that this problem may arise again in the future.

That said, I am content to go with amendment No 16 as proposed by the Committee, but I believe that the Committee and I will have further work to do on that in the future. I welcome the support which has been expressed for the amendments that I proposed.

Question, That amendment No 14 be made, put and agreed to.

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Amendment No 15 made: After clause 7 insert

"Examination of accused through intermediary

Examination of accused through intermediary

7B.—(1) In section 12(1) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (which at the passing of this Act is not in operation), the inserted Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of paragraph (2) insert "Subject to paragraph (2A),".

(3) After paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) A court may not give a direction under paragraph (3) unless—

(a) the court has been notified by the Department of Justice that arrangements for implementing such a direction have been made in relation to that court; and

(b) the notice has not been withdrawn.

(2B) The withdrawal of a notice given to a court under paragraph (2A) does not affect the operation of any direction under paragraph (3) given by that court before the notice is withdrawn."." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Amendment No 16 made: After clause 7 insert

"Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as form of contempt of court

7C.—(1) Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law.

(2) That abolition does not prevent proceedings for contempt of court being brought against a person for conduct that immediately before that abolition would have constituted both scandalising the judiciary and some other form of contempt of court." — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Commencement and transitional, etc. provisions)

Amendment No 17 made: In page 8, line 2, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert

"(1) Except as provided by subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent.

(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (Notification requirements: absence from notified address);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

Schedule 2 (Articles 63B to 63O of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, as inserted)

Mr Deputy Speaker: Turning to the third group of amendments, I remind Members that a petition of concern was tabled this morning to amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26 to the Criminal Justice Bill. Today's proceedings on the Bill will, therefore, stop at the Question on amendment No 20, and the Questions on the remainder of the Bill will be put on the next sitting day.

With amendment No 18, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 19 to 34.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Deputy Speaker, are you indicating that there will be no vote whatsoever today? It is just that I am uncertain as to —

Mr Deputy Speaker: For clarity, we will deal with the legislation in front of us until the first amendment that has been actioned by a petition of concern, so we will stop after amendment No 20.

As I said, with amendment No 18, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 19 to 34. The amendments deal with the rules for the retention of DNA, fingerprints and photographic material. Members should note that amendment No 21 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 22 and that amendment No 24 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 25.

Mr McCartney: I beg to move amendment No 18: In page 14, line 26, at end insert

"(c) a photograph taken as mentioned in sub-paragraph (a) (i) or (ii)".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 19: In page 14, line 27, after "Fingerprints" insert ", photographs". — *[Mr McCartney.]*

No 20: In page 15, line 14, leave out from "the conclusion" to end of line 17 and insert

"the Chief Constable determines that the material is of no evidential value in relation to—

(a) the investigation of the offence; or

(b) proceedings against any person for the offence." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 21: In page 15, line 41, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 16 and insert

"and

(c) the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Retention of Biometric Material has consented under Article 63DA to the retention of the material." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 22: In page 16, line 1, leave out paragraph (d) and insert

"(d) the District Judge (Magistrates' Court) has made an order under paragraph (13) for the retention of the material."— [Mr McCartney.]

No 23: In page 16, line 26, leave out paragraphs (11) and (12). — *[Mr McCartney.]*

No 24: In page 16, line 37, leave out paragraph (13). — *[Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

No 25: In page 16, line 37, leave out "Commissioner" and insert "District Judge (Magistrates' Court)". — *[Mr McCartney.]*

No 26: In page 17, leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert

"Retention of Article 63B material by virtue of Article 63D(5): consent of Commissioner

63DA.—(1) The Chief Constable may apply under paragraph (2) or (3) to the Commissioner appointed under Article 63D(11) for consent to the retention of Article 63B material which falls within Article 63D(5)(a) and (b).

(2) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that the material was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of an offence where any alleged victim of the offence was, at the time of the offence—

(a) under the age of 18,

(b) a vulnerable adult, or

(c) associated with the person to whom the material relates.

(3) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that—

(a) the material is not material to which paragraph (2) relates, but

(b) the retention of the material is necessary in the interests of public protection.

(4) The Department of Justice may by order amend paragraph (2) or (3).

(5) The Commissioner may, on an application under this Article, consent to the retention of material to which the application relates if the Commissioner considers that it is appropriate to retain the material.

(6) But where notice is given under paragraph (7) in relation to the application, the Commissioner must, before deciding whether or not to give consent, consider any representations by the person to whom the material relates which are made within the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the notice is given.

(7) The Chief Constable must give to the person to whom the material relates notice of—

(a) an application under this Article, and

(b) the right to make representations.

(8) Without prejudice to section 24 of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (service of documents), a notice under paragraph (7) may, in particular, be given to a person by sending it to the person by email or other electronic means.

(9) The requirement in paragraph (7) does not apply if the whereabouts of the person to whom the material relates is not known and cannot, after reasonable inquiry, be ascertained by the Chief Constable.

(10) An application or notice under this Article must be in writing.

(11) In this Article—

"victim" includes intended victim,

"vulnerable adult" means a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse or neglect is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, through old age or otherwise,

and the reference in paragraph (2)(c) to a person being associated with another person is to be read in accordance with Article 3(3) to (6) of the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 27: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons completing diversionary youth conference

63HB.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who has completed the diversionary youth conference process with respect to a recordable offence; and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.

(3) For the purposes of this Article, a person completes the diversionary youth conference process with respect to an offence if (and only if)—

(a) a diversionary youth conference under Part 3A of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 has been completed with respect to that person and that offence, and

(b) the Director of Public Prosecutions, having considered the report of the youth conference co-ordinator, has determined not to institute proceedings against the person in respect of the offence or, as the case may be, not to continue proceedings already instituted against the person in respect of the offence." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 28: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons given a penalty notice

63HC.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who is given a penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and in respect of whom no proceedings are brought for the offence to which the notice relates, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) from the person in connection with the investigation of the offence to which the notice relates.

(2) The material may be retained—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, for a period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken,

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, for a period of 2 years beginning with—

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 29: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons under 18 given a caution

63HA.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who—

(i) is given a caution in respect of a recordable offence which, at the time of the caution, the person admitted; and

(ii) is aged under 18 at the time of the offence, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken." — [Mr A Maginness.]

No 30: In page 22, line 32, leave out "do not". — *[Mr McCartney.]*

No 31: In schedule 3, page 23, line 9, after "fingerprints" insert ", photographs". — *[Mr McCartney.]*

No 32: In schedule 3, page 23, line 12, leave out from "that has come" to the end of line 13 and insert

"which—

(a) has been taken by the police from a person—

(i) under a power conferred by Article 62 or 63; or

(ii) with the consent of that person, in connection with the investigation of an offence by the police;

(b) consists of or includes human cells; and

(c) was taken for the purpose of deriving a DNA profile from it;". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

No 33: In schedule 3, page 23, line 29, leave out "which" and insert

"—

(i) which was committed when that person was aged 18 or over, and

(ii) which". — [Mr A Maginness.]

No 34: In schedule 3, page 24, line 6, leave out from beginning to "18(8)(b)" in line 9 and insert

"5. In Article 89 (orders and regulations) after paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) An order under Article 63DA(4) shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly."."

The Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 (c. 28)

6. In section 18(8)(c)".

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your clarity. As I understand it, there will be a number of votes until amendment No 20.

I will speak to the amendments tabled in my name and in the names of Seán Lynch and Rosie McCorley. For the record, they are amendment Nos 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, and 31. I will not move amendment No 30. We will oppose some of the amendments tabled by the Minister. Those are amendment Nos 20, 21, 24 and 26.

Mr Ford: I can assure the Member that, in the context of the petition of concern, I do not intend to move amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26.

I am grateful to the Member for giving way. If he will allow me to, I have something further to say. Mr Deputy Speaker, I understand the ruling that you have made that business will be suspended after the vote on amendment No 20. There seems to be something lacking in Standing Orders if, when the amendments subject to a petition of concern are not to be moved, we cannot proceed. I ask you to refer that issue to the Speaker or possibly the Committee on Procedures.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I assure the Minister that the Speaker has looked at this issue carefully, and he came to the judgement that he has passed on to me as Deputy Speaker. The Minister raises an interesting and valid point on procedure. Consideration has been given to the issue. For clarity on today's order of business, proceedings will stop after the Question on amendment No 20 has been put. However, the debate on this group of amendments will happen now, so the debate is about all the amendments standing on the Marshalled List in the third group, but voting will stop after amendment No 20. The Business Committee has agreed that the Consideration Stage of the Bill will be scheduled again for Monday 25 February, when the remaining Questions will be put.

Mr McCartney: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. In the first instance, I thank the Minister for not moving amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26. We look forward to a discussion with him and his officials on the appointment of a biometric commissioner. I know that the subject was discussed at today's Business Committee, and I concur with the Minister's well-made point about whether all amendments, apart from the three that were subject to a petition of concern, could have been voted on. I am sure that the Speaker will address that.

We will also support the amendments tabled in the name of Alban Maginness, which are amendment Nos 29 and 33. We will support the Minister's amendment Nos 27, 28, 32 and 34.

I will now provide a broad outline of the approach that we took on the formulation of the amendments and our opposition to some of the Minister's amendments. These points were made at every opportunity throughout Committee Stage during deliberations on the Bill. I acknowledge the role of the Committee staff, the departmental officials and those who provided evidence, because they helped us — they certainly helped me — deal with complex legislation.

It is worth recalling and putting in context the backdrop to and the need for, reason for and purpose of the provisions that are now in the Bill and why it had to be framed in a particular way. I refer to the Marper case, which was taken to the European Court of Human Rights. The court unanimously struck down the legislation that provided for the retention of fingerprints and DNA samples. The Assembly is now tasked with providing a legal remedy that should, in our opinion — we have made this known throughout — be human rights-compliant. Indeed, we want to extend the supervision of it to include the retention of photographs.

4.15 pm

We were guided and the Assembly should be guided by the principle of presumption of innocence. We cannot afford to legislate in a way that ignores the presumption of innocence, because, in many ways, you would create a defect immediately. Many people say that, if it is not human rights-compliant, it is nearly like soliciting another person having to take the matter to the European Court of Human Rights. We do not want to come back to revisit this in the future. I will major on the presumption of innocence because there is a provision in the Bill for the indefinite retention of DNA and fingerprints in cases in which a person is not charged as a result of an arrest, in which a person is not even subject to a prosecution, and, indeed, where no conviction comes about. That totally and absolutely undermines the principle of innocence. If a person is not convicted or even charged — if there is no prosecution — or if the person is released unconditionally, there is provision in the Bill for the retention of their DNA, fingerprints and photograph. That is not the task of the Assembly. The Assembly should always come down on the side of the presumption of innocence. Our approach and amendments protect that. We had a bit of a discussion earlier about the role of Assembly. It is to frame law, set law and protect citizens.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Wells: The role of the Assembly is not only to do that but to protect our citizens against criminals who, in many cases, are torturing their local community. The Member has to face the fact that there are many examples, with the technology that we now have, of people who have committed the most vile crimes being detected, convicted and imprisoned entirely on the basis of DNA profiling. He will, no doubt, try to avoid saying that the PSNI made it very clear to the Committee that the retention of that material was absolutely essential in pursuing those criminals.

The Member knows — I said this in Committee — that my DNA was taken after a minor traffic accident in 2001. I could have gone, if I had wanted to, to the police and asked them to destroy it, but I did not. The reason is simple: I have absolutely nothing to fear. If I keep my nose clean and do not get myself involved in any crime, I have absolutely nothing to worry about in the retention of that material. Will he deny the PSNI the right to have access to the most modern technology to detect criminals, or will he force it to destroy material that, he knows, in the future could well solve a horrible crime? The worst examples in GB have been of serial rapists who have terrorised women in their community and, on some occasions, murdered those women and have been caught as a direct result of the retention of their DNA. Will he deny the Police Service of Northern Ireland the opportunity to capture those individuals by demanding the destruction of that material?

Mr McCartney: There are a number of things. You should not presume that every person who is arrested is a criminal. That is the type of principle that we are trying to protect. When the PSNI was in, I noted that it made that observation. However, when it was asked about statistics and the number of cases that were solved because of that retention, it was not very forthcoming with the answers. There does not seem to be a direct correlation. As part

of the deliberations, we also heard that the database controlled by the British Home Office is 50 times bigger than the database in France. Yet, we were not told that the detection rate for any crime committed in Britain —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will indeed.

Mr Ford: Will the Member take it from me that the figures I have show that the database in England and Wales is something like six times the size of the one in France and that the proposals we are looking at would mean that our database would be somewhat smaller than the one in England and Wales? When I get to my speech, I will be able to give exact figures.

Mr McCartney: I appreciate that, but the figure I gave was presented to the Committee as coming from a piece of research. We were also told that the British database is five times greater than the European average and 10 times greater than the United States average. The point that I am making relates to what the PSNI and others who presented to the Committee said. Many of us in the Committee feel that we were in the car when you had that accident, because we have heard about it so many times. When you made the same observation to the human rights commissioner, he rightly made the point — you were there when he said it — that people's DNA is their personal property. Many of us would expect that, in certain circumstances, our house would be raided. He said that that does not mean that there is an open door so that the PSNI or any investigative authority can enter your house whenever they want. It does not mean that they can just say that they are there to prevent crime and ask why they cannot enter at any time if you have nothing to hide in your house. That is the point that was made. This is all about balance. If you have it at the core that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty, how do you protect that?

There was a recent case — we can all quote cases to put one argument against the other — in which the person won libel damages because he should never have been arrested in the first place. Under this Bill, that person's DNA would be retained. So, you can prove that you should not have been arrested and that you were libelled by people who suggested that you were a criminal and that, in the broad sweep of things, we should be protected against criminals, yet the legislation says that you have no right to say that your DNA should not be retained.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes, I will.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the Member giving way. Does the Member not agree that it is a flawed position that the retention of DNA equates to guilt? That is what the Member is articulating. He is saying that if you retain someone's DNA it means they are guilty. That is not what the Bill or the amendments are about. It is about finding the balance between the European Court's judgements and making sure that the public are protected. Is he not in that flawed position of equating the retention of DNA to guilt?

Mr McCartney: Many of those who presented to the Committee said that, in essence, that is what it was. As regards some of the material that we received, the Home Office consultation document had this strapline:

"Keeping the Right People on the DNA Database."

That was nearly saying that there is a category of person who is found guilty, but there is another category who we nearly profile as criminals, and, therefore, we want their —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes, I will indeed.

Mr Wells: Frankly, I do not care whether we have six times or 10 times the level of retention of France. As the Member for Lagan Valley has made clear, the retention does not lead to a conviction. The point made by several witnesses to the Committee was that very seldom is a conviction made on the basis of DNA alone. DNA evidence may help in the arrest of an individual, but it often requires other corroborative evidence to achieve a conviction. I keep asking the same question: if 10 times as many people in this part of the United Kingdom have their DNA retained as in France and that data is used correctly, what is there to fear?

I will give the Member another example. I carry a passport. It is a British passport, as I am sure you would expect. In order to get that passport, I have to have a photograph taken, and that is retained by the Border Agency. Why is that done? To ensure that, as I travel around the world, I can be identified if I am up to anything wrong. I do not object to that. No doubt he carries an Irish passport, but he does not object to his photograph being retained. There are 600,000 or 700,000 people in Northern Ireland who have one type of passport or another. So why is it wrong for the PSNI to retain photographs, DNA, fingerprints etc? Why is it wrong for the PSNI to retain that but all right for the Border Agency or the Irish passport authority to retain similar material?

Mr McCartney: The latter part of your point makes mine for me: the information is already there. There is photographic identification and documentation to show who we are and where we are, but what is framed here denies a person who is not proven guilty of any offence the right not to be held on a database. In essence, that says that you are part criminal, and we need to retain your DNA because it is part of what they would call a criminal investigation. Therefore, I do not think that you are comparing like with like.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will indeed.

Mr Givan: Does the Member not accept that some people may be happy to have their DNA retained because it would eliminate them from the investigative process and thus prove them innocent?

Mr McCartney: There may be and have been instances of voluntary processes, in which people are asked to volunteer their DNA. People come in, and conditions are set for the retention of DNA for an investigation, much in the same way as there is a provision in the Bill, which we support, for DNA found on a victim of assault or a sexual offence to be retained until the investigation is concluded. So this is not a case of saying that there should not be DNA retention or that investigators should not be given the scope and power to do what they need to do to make

an investigation successful. We are saying that there has to be a point at which a citizen is protected and can say, "I do not want my DNA to be retained. I have been arrested improperly and incorrectly, and there is no evidence against me, nor is any prosecution presented". Even should people go to court and be found not guilty, holding on to their DNA supports the view that they are nearly not guilty. People have to be protected against that type of perception. That is what legislation is about. That is the counter to Jim Wells's position that there should be an amendment to create a compulsory process of collecting DNA and fingerprints and you should have no rights about your house because, let us face it, if you have nothing to hide there, why should the PSNI not knock at your door whenever it feels like it and come in to look round? Even Jim Wells would object to that. I do not think that we can do that.

This afternoon, I have heard people being described as having right-wing views, and that is what taking that approach is about. You must keep it in mind that this went to the European Court of Human Rights and was struck down, so the people we task with protecting us through legislation ruled against it. The Minister can respond to this. There is a suspicion, feeling, sense or even a concern that this, as presented, does not comply with that ruling. In essence, we are saying that we think that we have made a mistake that we are now correcting to a degree, but, in the long term, if someone takes a case, we will find ourselves back here. We have the opportunity to do the right thing, and, by doing the right thing, the presumption of innocence should be at the core.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): If Members will bear with me, I want to run through the Committee's position on all the amendments in the group, albeit that we will not vote on most of them until Monday. I will make some general comments about the clauses and schedules that bring in a new framework for the retention of fingerprints and DNA profiles, before turning to the specific amendments tabled for consideration today.

From the first time that the Department produced policy proposals for a new framework to govern the retention and destruction of fingerprints, DNA samples and profiles, it has been clear that there was unlikely to be a meeting of minds among all Committee members. The Committee agreed to support clause 7 and schedules 2 and 3, which insert PACE NI, the new framework governing the retention and destruction of fingerprints and DNA samples. However, there was a clear divergence of views on this. Some Committee members acknowledged the requirement for changes, given the 2008 judgement of the ECHR in the case of S and Marper v the United Kingdom that the indefinite retention of DNA and fingerprints from unconvicted individuals violated article 8 — the right to privacy — and expressed the view that the proposals in the Bill were proportionate and would continue to assist in the detection and prevention of crime, which is in the interest of public protection, although at least one member indicated a preference to retain the existing framework.

Other members, however, expressed strong reservations about whether the proposals for the retention of material are proportionate and necessary, particularly for those who have been arrested or charged but not convicted of a qualifying offence in relation to the policy of indefinite retention in a substantial category of offences and in relation to children and young people.

4.30 pm

They were also concerned with the inclusion of cautions, penalty notices and diversionary youth conferences in the retention framework. Those members indicated that they had serious concerns about whether the framework as proposed is compatible with human rights standards, and they were therefore not content with clause 7 and schedules 2 and 3. They indicated their intention to table a number of amendments relating to that part of the Bill at Consideration Stage, and the members from Sinn Féin and the SDLP have obviously done that.

A particular issue that the Committee discussed at length relates to the retention of material for persons convicted of a recordable offence. Article 63F provides for the retention of material indefinitely from all adults convicted or cautioned for any recordable offence and all young persons convicted or cautioned for more than one recordable offence. Given the very wide range of offences covered by the use of recordable offences, questions were raised about whether that approach is necessary and proportionate.

Some Committee members were content with the retention proposals, noting that a recent High Court judgement found that the policy of indefinite retention of data of convicted offenders in a substantial category of offences is not disproportionate, is lawful and is, indeed, rational. Other Committee members, however, expressed concerns about whether the approach is proportionate and necessary and whether it complies with the ECHR ruling in the S and Marper case. They indicated that they would not support that aspect of the retention framework.

I will endeavour to provide some further insight into the Committee's deliberations on the issues as they relate to amendment Nos 18, 19 and 31, which Mr McCartney tabled. The introduction of a legislative framework for the retention of photographs by the PSNI was raised in the evidence that was submitted to the Committee on that part of the Bill. The Department had previously highlighted that the ECHR judgement that has brought about the need to change the retention framework imposes no obligation in the retention of photographs. The Department was, however, of the view that it was likely that, if the current practice of indefinitely retaining photographs of persons taken on arrest were to remain unchanged, the police would face legal challenge at some point.

During the Committee Stage, the Department indicated that, following a case against the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, the Association of Chief Police Officers has set up a working group, on which the PSNI is represented, to bring the management of police information guidelines into compliance with the ECHR. The retention of photographs falls under those guidelines, and the PSNI will implement agreed best practice. The Department stated that it was satisfied with that approach and therefore did not intend to bring photographs within the retention framework. The Committee noted the position on the photographs. My party will certainly support that position and will therefore oppose the Sinn Féin amendment.

Amendment No 20 will amend article 63C, which enables article 63B material that is taken from a person in connection with the investigation of an offence to be retained until the conclusion of the investigation by the police, or, where legal proceedings are instituted against a person, until the conclusion of those proceedings. The Committee sought clarification on the point at which the conclusion of an investigation is deemed to have occurred, and it raised concerns that that article did not adequately reflect the intention of the provision.

The Department confirmed that the policy intention of the provision was that the material should not be retained once it had been established that it is of no evidential value to the investigation. However, the Attorney General had asked that the original drafting be revised to permit the retention of material if it were likely to be probative against, for example, a co-defendant, rather than solely against the individual from whom it was taken. With that qualification, the Department agreed to consider further the wording of the provision.

The subsequent amendment, which is being considered today, aims to clarify the provision by linking retention to the perceived utility of the material, rather than to the conclusion of the investigation. The Committee is content to support the amendment, given that it addresses the concerns that were raised.

Amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26 relate to the prescribed circumstances. A number of organisations raised concerns with the Committee that the prescribed circumstances referred to in article 63D are not set out in the Bill but would be left to subordinate legislation. The prescribed circumstances relate to the range of circumstances in which the threshold for the retention of material from unconvicted persons may be set aside.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules also drew the Committee's attention to this provision. It was his view that, given that it is a substantive amendment of primary legislation, the prescribed circumstances that relate to the application for the biometric commissioner's consent to retain fingerprints and DNA profiles should be set out in the Bill, with power to amend by way of subordinate legislation, subject to affirmative resolution if necessary, rather than leaving it to subordinate legislation, subject to negative resolution, as is currently proposed.

In order to address the concerns that were raised, the Department agreed to set out those prescribed circumstances in the Bill, hence the amendments tabled by the Minister today, albeit that they are not going to be moved. The prescribed circumstances reflect those in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, with the exception of the second part of the provision. As the provision is aimed at protecting some of the most vulnerable in society, the Department considered that a formulation that focused closely on the protection of the public rather than the broader prevention and detection of crime is appropriate and would relate exclusively to circumstances in which an individual has been arrested in connection with a serious, violent or sexual offence but where there is insufficient evidence to bring charges.

The Committee agreed to support the amendments, with some members indicating that, in their view, this is an appropriate approach that does not reflect on the innocence or otherwise of the individual and will assist in the detection and prevention of crime, and, therefore, is in the interest of public protection. Other members indicated that they would not support the amendment, given that it related to the retention of material from those arrested or charged but not convicted. In their view, that undermines the presumption of innocence and due process, and they have serious concerns about whether the framework, as proposed, particularly in relation to people not convicted, is compatible with human rights.

Again, on this particular issue, my party supported the amendments tabled by the Minister. Obviously, they are now subject to a petition of concern. Indeed, many of the organisations that came before the Committee, such as the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) and others, made the point very strongly that all these things should be set out in the Bill rather than being subject to the negative resolution procedure. In my view, the amendments strengthen the position of the House to be able to take decisions on the matter. Obviously, other Members have a fundamental disagreement with the principle itself, as opposed to whatever mechanism is used to bring it into effect. However, we were content with the amendments that were tabled.

Amendment Nos 22, 23 and 25 relate to article 63D, the retention of article 63B material and persons arrested for or charged with a qualifying offence with regard to the role of the biometric commissioner. Indeed, the need for one was discussed by the Committee during its consideration of the evidence that was received on this part of the Bill. The Department confirmed that, where the police are of the view that the prescribed circumstances apply, the Bill allows them to seek the approval of a biometric commissioner to retain the material. The commissioner will be a public authority within the definition of section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 and will be obliged to observe the ECHR.

During the Bill's Committee Stage, the Department explored, with the police and the courts, the possibility of the proposed role of the biometric commissioner being undertaken by the courts. Having considered the matter further, the Department advised the Committee that, without experience of operating the new framework, the police had been unable to estimate the likely volume of cases once it is up and running, but anticipated that numbers could be considerable at start-up as they process the historical abuse inquiries, along with other cases. Without a clear idea of the likely volume and the associated resource implications, the courts were understandably reluctant to take the business on.

The Department also indicated that, if the courts were to accept the task, although reporting restrictions could be imposed, hearings would be public with a requirement on an applicant to make representation in court. The risk that public opinion would reach a view on their innocence might be seen to undermine the willingness of some to make such representations. The Department said that it would remain the case that, were the commissioner to find against an applicant, they would be entitled to seek judicial review of any such decision.

The Department indicated that it intended to proceed with the biometric commissioner, but gave an undertaking to keep the matter under review. The Committee indicated that it was content with that approach, although some

members highlighted issues with it. From my party's perspective, we were content with the proposals that it would be for the biometric commissioner to deal with this, for those reasons that I have outlined previously.

Amendment No 27 to schedule 2 relates to retention of article 63B material in respect of persons completing diversionary youth conferences. In the course of our deliberations on the Bill, the Department advised the Committee that it intended to bring forward an amendment to bring completion of a diversionary youth conference within the framework on the same basis as a caution. The Department indicated that both those disposals require acceptance of guilt on the part of the offender and so are treated as convictions for the purposes of the retention framework.

While the Committee supported the proposed amendment, some members expressed the same concerns regarding the inclusion of completion of a diversionary youth conference within the framework as they had with the inclusion of cautions. Since the Committee agreed to support the amendment to bring the completion of diversionary youth conferences within the framework on the same basis as a caution, the Minister has written to advise members that he is minded to accept the amendment tabled by Mr Maginness to amend the treatment of cautions awarded to juveniles, which I will come to shortly. The Minister has indicated that his intention to accept this amendment has implications for the treatment of diversionary youth conferences within the framework. He has, therefore, brought a revised amendment along the lines of that proposed by Mr Maginness for cautions. The Committee noted the intention of the Minister with regard to this amendment at its meeting last Thursday.

My party will oppose Mr Maginness's amendment. Given that the Minister's amendment was to keep in line with what Mr Maginness proposed in respect of how cautions are treated, we will vote against what the Minister has proposed in respect of this issue. I will elaborate a little bit more on that when I get to Alban Maginess's amendment.

Amendment No 28 relates to retention of article 63B material in respect of persons given a penalty notice. This was another new provision that the Department advised the Committee that it intended to bring forward at Consideration Stage to permit limited retention for two years in cases where a penalty notice has been issued under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

When questioned by the Committee, the departmental officials clarified that, generally, penalty notices would be issued without an arrest but that, in those cases in which a person was arrested for a recordable offence, his or her fingerprints and DNA would be taken and, in the event of a penalty notice being the disposal used, the two-year retention provision would apply.

Again, this is an area in which the Committee agreed to support the inclusion of the amendment, as drafted, in the Bill. Some Committee members indicated that they were content to allow limited retention in relation to penalty notices. Others, however, indicated that they had concerns regarding retention in relation to cases where a penalty notice has been issued on the same basis as cautions, and said that they would not support the proposed amendment.

Amendment Nos 29 and 33 relate to retention of article 63B material in respect of persons under 18 given a caution, and have been tabled by Mr Maginness. In the written and oral evidence received during the Bill's Committee Stage, organisations raised concerns that a caution was included within the definition of an offence for which a person is convicted. The organisations pointed out that cautions do not have the same status as convictions under other aspects of the criminal law. In their opinion, there was some disconnect between the Bill and what happens under other aspects of the law. Those organisations felt that considering cautions in this way is a disproportionate course of action and runs contrary to the purpose of a caution, which is to divert young people away from the criminal justice system.

In response to questioning from the Committee, the Department confirmed that a caution is treated as equivalent to a conviction for the purposes of the retention of DNA profiles and fingerprints because it involves acceptance of guilt. It is the Department's position that there is no logical basis for treating it otherwise for the purposes of the DNA and fingerprint databases.

A number of Committee members expressed concerns about the inclusion of a caution in the definition of an offence. Although noting that when a person is cautioned and accepts a caution, an acceptance of guilt is involved, they viewed the treatment of cautions as a conviction in the retention framework as inappropriate and something that in some way affects the purpose of a caution. They had particular concerns about children and young people, where the use of cautions is aimed at directing them away from reoffending, and indicated that they would not support the inclusion of cautions in the retention framework.

4.45 pm

Other Committee members were content with the inclusion of retention for a caution, on the basis that it would assist crime prevention and detection and that retention of DNA is not the same as a criminal record, in that it will not be disclosed.

The amendments tabled by Mr Maginness would change the treatment of juvenile cautions for the purpose of DNA retention. As I said earlier, the Minister advised the Committee last week that he was minded to accept the amendments, and the Committee noted that position.

Our party will be opposing the amendment that Mr Maginness has tabled. He tabled it in good faith, and I do not doubt for one minute the good intent behind it. However, what had originally been proposed by the Minister struck the compromise in respect of one caution: a second caution or conviction would lead to indefinite retention. Obviously, therefore, our party is not in a position to support the proposals that Mr Maginness will articulate shortly.

Finally, the Committee agreed to support amendment No 34, which corrects a drafting error in schedule 3, and, at its meeting last Thursday, noted the Minister's intention to table amendment No 32 to amend the definition of "DNA sample" in schedule 3 on the recommendation of Forensic Science Northern Ireland.

The DUP will be opposing all the amendments that have been tabled by Sinn Féin and the amendment tabled by Mr Maginness. As a consequence, we will be opposing the

Minister's amendment, which deals with diversionary youth conferences.

Mr Elliott: These schedules to the Bill and this group of amendments are generally about the retention of DNA and fingerprints. Other parties have indicated that they want photographs to be retained as well. What I want, what the Ulster Unionist Party wants and, I think, what the vast majority of the public want is to ensure that we are not soft on crime and are not soft on criminals.

I am concerned that some on the opposing Benches want to give criminals every possible opportunity to evade the law. That is the reasoning behind some of the amendments. I listened to Mr McCartney say that DNA is your personal property. Of course it is, but if it can be used for the benefit of the law and the benefit of the public, it should be. If it can be used to stop crime and to convict people of crime, it should be used, just as your other personal property, such as your computers or your clothes, can be used. If samples need to be taken, they need to be taken. As a legislative authority, we need to ensure that we give every possible help and assistance to the law authorities so that they can carry out their tasks, prevent crime and ensure that they bring criminals to justice.

I understand that we are, of course, subject to the ECHR, but we must provide every assistance possible to the law enforcement authorities and not use legislation to inhibit those authorities. The Ulster Unionist Party will not support any weakening of the law. Sinn Féin and the SDLP have submitted a petition of concern regarding the commissioner for the retention of biometric material, which is basically an appeal mechanism in the legislation. I have not heard any reasoning yet, although perhaps I will before the debate is over, as to why there is such opposition to that. I am quite happy to listen to that debate.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am quite happy to give way.

Mr McCartney: The Minister did not move his amendment. That is why we did not provide a rationale for our position, because we will be coming back to it. Our basic position is that it should be a matter for the courts.

Mr Elliott: I understand that, but I still have not heard the reasoning, and I have not heard an argument about why we should not have a commissioner and why it should go through the courts.

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. The SDLP is supportive of the Sinn Féin amendments on this matter because we believe that the courts are best suited and placed to deal with any issues that arise. A biometrics commissioner is well and good, but the courts have the experience and the authority, and I and my party believe that they should be the adjudicator, if necessary. It is a matter of choice, but we believe that due process is important and should be upheld.

Mr Elliott: I thank Mr Maginness; he will have the opportunity to explain more. I am pleased that he has tried to explain Sinn Féin's position, because it has not explained it itself. I am quite happy that —

Mr McCartney: I told you why.

Mr Elliott: Sorry? I am quite happy for Mr Maginness to put forward Sinn Féin's position for it; that is well and good for him. This has been debated at Committee, and we have had the opportunities to have those discussions, but neither Mr Maginness, Mr McCartney nor anybody else from those parties brought forward any of those issues for a much fuller and wider debate at Committee.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am happy to give way.

Mr McCartney: We raised it at the Committee on a number of occasions. Your attendance at the Committee is maybe suspect; you may not have been there on those particular days.

Mr Elliott: I take exception to that, because I am sure that my attendance is every bit as good, or near enough, as that of Mr McCartney and some of his colleagues. He raised at Committee his party's concern about what is proposed, not why it wants something different and the reasoning for that, and that is why I believe that we have not had a reasonable opportunity to do that. It is the same with quite a number of the amendments: we have not had the opportunity to discuss them more fully at Committee. It would have been helpful to have that chance, and it may have helped us to understand much better, but we are quite happy to do it here and now and bring it back if necessary.

The Ulster Unionist Party will not support any weakening of the law, where reasonably possible, but we are quite happy to listen to the debate.

Mr A Maginness: I agree with Mr Elliott that it is important to support the law, and we, as a party, are anxious to support the law, but the law is not simply a matter of procedure but includes concerns about citizens' rights. Those concerns are enshrined in law through the Human Rights Act and through the European Convention on Human Rights.

It is quite clear, given the judgement in the Marper case, that we, in this jurisdiction, have an issue with the retention of DNA and fingerprints. Therefore, it is important for us to get our law right and to make it consistent with the judgement of the court. Therefore, we, as a party, along with other colleagues, are attempting to get the best legislation possible, and we believe that we should recognise the human rights issues.

Therefore, we are concerned that there should not be an overzealous approach to the retention of DNA. Yes, we accept in principle that DNA should be retained for a period of time when people commit offences. However, there are a number of other permutations. One relates to young people, and another relates to people who were arrested or charged where those charges were not completed by their going to court or by there being no conviction. Is it right and proper — that is the proposition that one has to put to the Assembly — that the DNA should be retained of people who were charged and not convicted and that their fingerprints be retained? That is the question.

In certain circumstances, it is not unreasonable for there to be limitations on that. In those particular circumstances, I suggest that there be no retention. When people commit offences and break the law, there has to be retention. That is right and proper, and the European Court and our own courts recognise that and see no problem with that, but, in a situation where you have indefinite retention —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, certainly.

Mr Wells: The scenario is more likely to be where a young juvenile commits a crime, a PSNI officer is perfectly aware that a crime has been committed and the situation is disposed of by means of a caution. All the evidence indicates that, if you take and retain the DNA, that individual is as likely to spiral down into a life of crime. However, if you have retained the DNA, you will often have some way of proving that the person has done the next crime that he or she commits. If you destroy the DNA, you will probably have no evidence to confirm that that person committed that crime.

I am surprised at the Member because he is a learned barrister of considerable experience. Implicit in what he is saying is that something will happen to that retained material by the authorities. He is saying that it will be abused or used wrongly or used to convict someone who is innocent. There is not a shred of evidence that that has happened.

I cannot tie down from any of those who are opposing this what is the real fear about what could happen to the material beyond the fact that it has been stored. I do not subscribe to this nonsense that it is a gross infringement of someone's privacy, that it brands them or that they spend the rest of their life with this burden that, because their DNA has been retained, they feel a criminal. It is absolute nonsense.

The young lads who are torturing my community in south Down could not care less whether their DNA has been retained from that aspect. Where they are scared is that they know that, if they commit another crime and their DNA is retained, they have a very good chance of being caught. So, he needs to explain why he, as a moderate, constitutional nationalist, is throwing his hat in the ring with Sinn Féin on this issue.

Mr A Maginness: It is not a matter of throwing one's hat in the ring with Sinn Féin, the DUP or anyone else. It is a matter of taking this issue on its merits, examining it and coming to a conclusion based on the law and on human rights. The Member will say that it does not matter to the individual. However, where a person's DNA and fingerprints are taken and they have not committed a crime, there is an implication that they are guilty of some offence.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will give way, yes.

Mr Wells: The amendment extends even further than that to photographs. Mr McCartney could not answer the question, but Mr McCartney, of course, comes from a different background to the SDLP. I will deal with that later. He could not answer why it is wrong for the police to retain photographs when the passport agencies in both jurisdictions will retain routinely passport photographs for many, many years. What is the difference? I do not feel that it is a gross infringement of my civil liberties if that happens.

Mr A Maginness: I suppose the difference is that, with the passport agency, you are not involving the courts or any imputation of misbehaviour or offending or anything of that nature. It is, essentially, a voluntary action on your part to give your photograph to the passport service.

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

5.00 pm

It is to your benefit, in so far as the agency has a record of your photograph so, if you get ill or there is a problem abroad, you can be assisted. Indeed, your photograph can be used for simple recognition so that you have no problem going through customs or passport control. So there is a material distinction, I believe, between the two situations. DNA, fingerprints and photographs are all the same type of material, so it is logical that photographs should be included with DNA and fingerprints.

Mr Wells raised a point about cautions. My amendment relating to young people deals with that. I think it important that I outline to the Assembly my position on that. It is amendment No 29.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, of course.

Mr Allister: Just before the Member moves off the original point, in trying to follow through his logic about retention, I want to understand how far it takes him. Does he hold that the authorities should not be able to retain a record of the name of a person arrested?

Mr A Maginness: No, I do not believe that you could reasonably object to that.

Mr Allister: On that premise, if it is not reasonable to object to the retention of the identity of a person, how is it reasonable to object to the means of identifying a person?

Mr A Maginness: The point of distinction is that the name is simply a record. I do not believe that you are talking about a material substance, such as DNA, fingerprints and photographs. I believe that there is a distinction to be made between those three things and a person's name. It is quite clear that there is a distinction between them.

Let me go on with my point on cautions, particularly of young people, and I refer to amendment No 29. I have to say that there was a lot of lobbying on this aspect of the Bill by witnesses before the Committee. Quite a number of organisations put forward submissions or gave evidence. One was the Children's Law Centre, and others included the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Opportunity Youth, the NIACRO and GeneWatch UK.

All of them reflected similar concerns. The Children's Law Centre, for example, said that cautions do not have the same status as convictions. It said that having retention where a caution was given would be a disproportionate course of action because it runs contrary to the purported purpose of a caution.

I ask colleagues to consider a situation in which a caution is given to a young person. The reason why a caution is given is to try to avoid circumstances in which that young person will become re-involved in the criminal justice system. If an additional aspect to that caution is that the person's DNA or fingerprints are retained, it diminishes the caution and makes it appear as though you were guilty of a crime in the ordinary sense that you committed an offence. I understand the Department 's argument, which was that, whenever you accept a caution, you are

also accepting that you are guilty to some extent. That is a basic proposition that I do not seek to undermine. Nonetheless, if we are trying to move young people — minors — away from the criminal justice system, I believe that this undermines the value of a caution.

A number of those organisations that I referred to repeated that argument. However, it is interesting to note that the Public Prosecution Service's (PPS) code for prosecutors states that cautions are not regarded as convictions. So, on the one hand, we have a caution that could merit retention, while on the other hand, we have the PPS code for prosecutors saying that a caution is not a conviction.

The Children's Commissioner said that it was inappropriate and disproportionate to have retention.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does the Member seriously and genuinely believe that all that he has talked about so far on these clauses since he got to his feet will help the police on the ground to make our streets safer?

Mr A Maginness: That is a proposition that I am sure the Member holds very sincerely. However, the point that I will make to the Member is that, if we materially diminish cautions in some way, I think that we will do a disservice to an alternative way of dealing with young people who offend or who are likely to offend. That is a disservice. Although you say that it will help the police and all the rest, in the wider scheme of things it might help to undermine what the police do, and it might help to undermine the whole business of good policing in the community.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Mr Humphrey: Where is the evidence for the assertion that he just made?

Mr A Maginness: I am putting forward a proposition that the various respected organisations that I referred to reflected. Those included the Children's Commissioner, who has a public duty to look after the interests of young people and children in particular; Opportunity Youth, which is, again, a respected organisation; and NIACRO, which is highly respected and which said that it was inconsistent with the spirit of the Youth Justice Review. The Youth Justice Review spoke of wiping out young people's records when they reached the age of 18 so that there would be a clean slate and they could move on. That is because they wanted to try to decriminalise young people who offended, maybe when they were younger but, because of maturity and so forth, were moving forward.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes.

Mr Wells: This is going too far. There is no evidence for anything that he is saying. Before DNA was ever discovered, young people were cautioned and, sadly, the vast majority of them went on to commit much more serious offences for the rest of their lives. Then DNA comes along, they are cautioned, the DNA test is taken and at least the police can catch them when they start to inflict pain on their community.

The Member is trying to mimic what some of the witnesses said: because the DNA of a young person who has, for the sake of argument, been smashing a pensioner's window, is retained, he then carries the scars and mental anguish of that for the rest of his life and that drives him to a life of crime because he feels that he has been branded a criminal. Absolute nonsense. The evidence indicates that the vast majority of them do not even remember that their DNA was retained in the first place, that it just happens as part of the process, and they move on.

What it does mean, however, is that life for the police is made easier if they can carry out tests to apprehend that criminal at a later stage. No one has indicated any evidence to support what was said by those three groups that came before the Committee. They are liberal in their views and are certainly not out to help the PSNI. My support lies with the policewoman or policeman out on the streets, trying desperately hard to rid our community of individuals who are torturing it. That is where my sympathies lie; not with some mythical, non-existent evidence that people carry the burden of their DNA being kept in some locker in a police station.

Mr A Maginness: Those organisations are not anti-police. They are not opposed to law and order or good policing. In fact, they are for good policing and law and order. They want to bring about a situation in which young people who are offending cease to offend or to stop people offending in the first instance. Their bona fides, I believe, are well established in the community.

Government recognises those bodies. The Children's Commissioner is an official public post. NIACRO is a very respected organisation that does tremendous work in the community. If some of the policies and measures that those organisations talked about were put in place and into practice, we would probably have much less offending. That is their opinion. I accept the point that you are making and have made a number of times, namely this: where is the evidence?

Mr Wells: Non-existent.

Mr A Maginness: Where is the evidence in relation to the proposition that you make? It is an opinion —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: In one moment. It is an opinion that those organisations are expressing, but one that is considered, reasonable and has the interests of the wider community at heart. I do not think that it is just some nonsense that people have cooked up to satisfy their own sense of ego.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that privacy is a very subjective matter? In this House, we all forgo and concede a significant amount of privacy.

To give an example of where somebody may be very protective of their privacy, there are people on Facebook on whose profiles, if you search for their name, you will find only their name and no pictures or personal information because that is what they choose. Being on Facebook and being viewed on Facebook is in no way an implication of criminality but they still feel that, to protect their privacy, they want to retain that information and to release it only to those whom they choose. That is how they wish to maintain their privacy, and that privacy is protected under human rights law. It is not for us to decide what someone should or should not include under privacy. That is for them to decide. What the human rights laws

protect is people's privacy, and that is what we are talking about.

5.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful to the Member for his comments. I agree with him entirely. But I suppose, in a sense, I am now about to contradict myself. The two amendments that I put forward are a compromise. The compromise is to accept that retention lasts for a period of up to five years. The point I am making is that that is a compromise. I accept that it would be very difficult for the Department to concede the full argument that there should be no retention whatsoever.

The desirable and ideal situation is that there be no retention at all in relation to cautions. However, we live in the real world, and the Department errs on the side of caution, if I may put it that way. Therefore, it will have no truck with that particular argument. So, I am not being purist at all. I am putting forward a proposition that is reasoned and reasonable and restricts retention to a five-year period. That is a reasonable position to adopt. I ask the DUP, in particular, and the Ulster Unionists to revisit this. It would be a pity to divide the House on the issue. You will have another week to think about it. Think long and hard, and come to the right decision, which is to support my amendments. I think that we could make progress on that.

I will conclude there, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. There are no other issues that I need to enlarge upon at this point.

Mr Dickson: Mr Wells and I are probably going to have to agree again in this Chamber. I will give him my liberal view, and that is that DNA should be retained.

Mr McCartney takes the view that permitting the retention of material from unconvicted persons does not go far enough in addressing the Marper judgment. I think that that is where he is coming from on that. I always think that it is perhaps important that people get a full understanding of what a particular judgement is saying, what it is about, how it fits and what it is trying to do.

Mr McCartney appears to wish to interpret the Marper judgment as saying that no material should be retained from anyone not convicted. Quite clearly that is not what the decision is about at all. The decision says that it is permissible to retain material from those persons who have not been convicted. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to have an appropriate framework that holds an appropriate database to allow the police and the judicial system to go about their job of protecting the public. That is very clear. The retention of a person's private data cannot be equated in any way with the voicing of suspicions against that individual.

The amendments brought forward in respect of the retention and destruction of photographs were also briefly raised during the Committee's deliberations. It was argued that the photographs do not represent the same intrusion into a person's privacy, because they are not searchable, for example, in the same way as DNA and fingerprints —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I will.

Mr McCartney: I have no desire to put the Member in a position. However, let me read the evidence given to the Committee by a departmental official in response to a question from Basil McCrea. He asked:

> *"What if the case has been before the courts and the individual is found to be innocent?"*

The response was:

> *"It is a question of balancing the protection of the public in that there was, at some point prior to acquittal, for example, sufficient suspicion of an individual."*

Therefore, the Department is actually saying that it is being retained on the basis that there is sufficient suspicion. Where is the presumption of innocence?

Mr Dickson: I am not sure that you can have a direct read-across to a presumption of innocence. This is about retaining information that allows the police and other parts of the judicial system to go about their duties and to safeguard those individuals, by allowing the appropriate authorities to eliminate them from a specific case or, within the framework, from proceedings at some future stage.

I will press on with photographs. The Justice Committee was told that the Association of Chief Police Officers had set up an appropriate working group. It is working with the PSNI to bring about management information guidelines, which will make the retention of photographs compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. That is valuable and welcome. We accept that that is important work and that it is under way. It should be allowed to continue unhindered until brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Therefore, we are not prepared to support amendment Nos 18, 19 and 31.

Reference has also been made to amendments relating to the role of a proposed biometric commissioner.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Yes.

Mr Agnew: I would like clarification on the issue of photos. I am in the position of listening to the debate before I make up my mind, which I know is rare in politics. What is the Member's differentiation? He mentioned searchability, but my understanding is that there is technology that allows you to search a photo database. The point has been made about why we should distinguish between a name and a photo. Why should we distinguish between a photo and a fingerprint?

Mr Dickson: Without going into too many details, I think that some Members and, sometimes to the benefit of the police, too many people seem to think that what they see on 'CSI' works in reality. As I understand it, the reality is that photo databases are not searchable and do not work in that way. We are a very long way off having to mistrust the retention of photographs.

I will move on. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission stated that it had no difficulty with the appointment of a biometric commissioner, as it could make for a more efficient operation of the state. It made the point that it cannot go into every courtroom every time that there is a dispute of this nature. However, it also wanted guarantees that the commissioner would conduct his or

her duties in compliance with human rights obligations. Of course, those obligations would fall to it, as a public authority, and it would be required to observe the ECHR. That should allay any reservations about non-compliance.

The Committee was told that the Department explored, with the police and the courts, the prospect of the latter taking on responsibility for the proposed role of a biometric commissioner, but they were reluctant to do so, as the police could not estimate the number of cases on start-up. The number is likely to be considerable, especially as historical abuse cases are being processed along with other cases, as the Chair of the Committee pointed out.

If the courts were to accept the task, it should be borne in mind that reporting restrictions could be imposed on them. Court hearings are public hearings, and there may be people who wish to challenge the biometric retention of information about them, but they would not want that to form part of public proceedings. Therefore, it is fair to suggest that the commissioner would be a more appropriate route for looking at and challenging the retention of biometric information.

We believe that a commissioner taking on that role, subject to the ECHR, would be better for the provision of faster, fairer justice but that it should be kept under review. It is more appropriate for a commissioner than it is for the courts, which would allow for the retention of that information in a public forum, rather than through the private route of a commissioner's office, but subject to ECHR scrutiny. Therefore, we cannot support amendment Nos 22, 23 and 25.

I will now turn to juvenile cautions and amendment Nos 29 and 33. The Children's Law Centre pointed out to the Committee its concerns about under-18s who receive two cautions for minor recordable offences having their DNA and fingerprints retained indefinitely. A number of other respondents also expressed concerns about the status of cautions with regard to under-18s.

Having considered those matters, the Alliance Party is prepared to support the amendments that have been tabled by Mr Maginness that remove indefinite retention and introduce retention for five years. Indeed, that seems to be a proportionate response. It is just a pity that he cannot extend that response in a proportionate way to other retentions. It strikes an appropriate balance between protecting the public and ensuring that under-18s who have accepted their guilt do not have their DNA and fingerprints retained for the rest of their life.

Finally, amendment No 30 relates to the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996. It is my understanding that the Act provides for the safeguarding of material so that it can be used in certain appeals, thus working to prevent miscarriages of justice. Removing the exemption would mean that such material would be destroyed to the detriment of fairness and accuracy in the justice system. It seems wrong that we would destroy material that could be used to overturn a conviction at some stage in the future. For that reason, my party will not support the amendment. We will oppose the Sinn Féin amendments and support the SDLP amendments and the Bill as it stands.

Mr Wells: In his absence, I pay tribute to our Chairperson, Paul Givan, who has guided us through this very difficult legislation, and, of course, our very loyal and helpful staff. I must say that I think that we all agree that Paul has shown himself to be a rising star in the Assembly.

Mr Hamilton: He will be damned now.

Mr Wells: Yes; I suppose that is the kiss of death to his political career, I should say. Not to be facetious —

Mr A Maginness: What about the Deputy Chair?

Mr Wells: No, no; Mr Givan is a rising star. Mr McCartney falls into my age group of political has-beens.

Certainly, in my opinion, Mr Givan has been extremely effective in his chairmanship of the Committee and has worked well with our experienced staff to guide us through what is a very difficult issue. Again, it is confirmation of the need to have the Assembly that, rather than having direct rule Ministers simply laying it down as Holy Writ, we can, in a democratic society, debate, analyse and take evidence on those very important issues.

It also has to be emphasised that, with regard to the vast majority of the Bill, there was unanimity in the Committee. There was no falling out, but there was an issue that divided the Committee right down the middle week after week. I think that the dichotomy is between those who support the police and want to do absolutely everything that they can to help the PSNI in its extremely difficult task of trying to keep people safe from criminals, and those who, for very obvious reasons, support the police outwardly, but still resent some of what they did in the past, and will do only the basic minimum to help them in their task.

Let us be honest: the elephant in the room is that we all know why Sinn Féin would not want the retention of DNA, fingerprints and photographs. The reality is that, had those techniques been available effectively in the 1970s and 1980s, an awful lot of its erstwhile friends would have been locked up long ago for their terrorist crimes. Therefore, Sinn Féin, by its very DNA and nature, will always oppose anything that facilitates the police in nabbing the criminal. That is its history. We expect that from Sinn Féin.

Mr McCartney can use all the lines and propaganda that he has been given by Connolly House, but we know his background. We know where he has come from. We know where many of the other Members on those Benches have come from. They have come from a terrorist background. Hopefully, that is in the past, but that is where they have come from. They will resist anything that facilitates the work of the PSNI. They may sit on the Policing Board and the district policing partnerships or the CSPs, as they are now called. They may sit on the Justice Committee, but theirs is a very lukewarm and tacit support for the PSNI and the work that it does.

5.30 pm

The surprising aspect of this is not Sinn Féin — I expect it from them. The real surprise is the SDLP. The SDLP has not only opposed these techniques being used effectively by the police but, even worse, signed the petition of concern. It knows full well the implications of signing that petition of concern. Those of us who have tried to work with the SDLP at a local level have seen a greening of that party in recent weeks. We have seen it in the Gerry McGeough issue and the McCreesh park issue in Newry, where Mr Bradley's friends in Newry and Mourne District Council meekly put their hands up to support the naming of a play park after an IRA terrorist.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Member to come back to the Bill. We are straying slightly beyond it at this point. I ask the Member to come back to the Bill to debate the issue.

Mr Wells: I was actually allowed to stray further than I expected. *[Laughter.]* I am very pleased that I got as far as I did. We have seen that greening, and it has now been shown.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Agnew: I ask the Member please to use a term other than "greening", because he and I could both be accused of being green but maybe not in this regard.

Mr Wells: I use "green" not in the sense of sound environmental policy but in terms of republicanism.

They have become more republican. They have meekly — no doubt instructed by their friends in Sinn Féin — walked into the Speaker's Office and signed the petition of concern. They know the implications. They had the option this afternoon — it is rapidly becoming this evening — of fighting the valiant fight by putting down a marker, expressing their concerns and voting accordingly or of putting their name to a petition of concern knowing that they will effectively block everything.

We are now in a bit of a mess, because of the petition of concern and the fact that the Minister will now not move some of the amendments, which means that we will have to come back and start all over again. They still have time to recant, confess their sins, come to the Speaker's Office with those others who are looking repentance as well, change their minds and adopt a much more moderate approach. That could be done without any loss of face or principle. They still have that opportunity. However, if they — so-called constitutional moderate nationalists, with a very small "c" and a very small "m" at times — persist in what they are doing, the legislation will inevitably be considerably weaker, and criminals will get off as a result.

Mr McCartney, again using his text supplied by Connolly House, and, to a lesser extent, Mr Maginness — probably original thought in his case — have said that there is no evidence that the retention of DNA photographs and fingerprints will lead to a greater level of convictions. I do not care, because if the retention of DNA means that one rapist in Northern Ireland is caught and stopped from terrorising the women of this Province, as has happened in England and Scotland on many occasions, it is all worthwhile.

With modern technology, a minute sample of DNA can give evidence to help in a conviction. I say "help in a conviction", because all the evidence indicates that DNA is additional to other evidence, but sometimes it is crucial. Evidence beyond DNA is still required to prove a case beyond reasonable doubt. There is very little indication that anyone on the mainland has been convicted entirely as a result of DNA evidence, but it has been used as corroborating evidence. This will make life more difficult.

I am not interested in the viewpoint of liberal organisations such as the Children's Commissioner or Include Youth; I am interested in the people at the coalface of catching and prosecuting criminals in Northern Ireland. The evidence from the police, when they came before us, could not have been clearer. They made it absolutely clear that they wanted the option to retain that material as it would help them greatly in their very difficult task of protecting our community.

What was evident from what was said by Mr McCartney, Mr Maginness and, of course, Mr Agnew, who is the arch-liberal, so we expect it from him — sound on the environment but heretical on everything else — is that there is not a shred of evidence to indicate that the retention of DNA and, of course, now photographs, which has come into the mix as well because Sinn Féin wants even photographs to be destroyed, causes any psychological trauma to the individuals concerned, many of whom simply forget about the fact that it has been taken or perhaps do not even know what was taken.

So there is no evidence. They cannot bring before me scores of young individuals who say that their lives have been traumatised and they have been carrying this burden of guilt on their shoulders —

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I will make a couple of points. First, I hope that his commitment to evidence is as strong when it comes to proposals for stricter penalties, longer sentences and, indeed, from some his colleagues, the death penalty — I do not know whether he shares that view — despite evidence that such things are counterproductive.

Secondly, I heard the exchange between Mr Wells and Mr McCartney. The debate has become a black-and-white, polemical one: we should retain DNA completely in every case all the time; or we should never retain DNA in any case if someone is not convicted. The Bill highlights different cases. In some cases in which people are deemed innocent, DNA is destroyed. In other cases, distinctions are made; the Member mentioned rape, which is the perfect example of there being good, sound reasons for retaining DNA. It is not my job to bring the debate back to the Bill, but can we recognise the fact that we do differentiate? If Mr Wells's view is correct that there is never any reason to destroy DNA, why is he supporting a Bill that states that we should?

Mr Wells: The reason why we are in this predicament is because of the so-called European Court of Human Rights, which does not mean the European Community. People fail to remember that membership of the European Court of Human Rights stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Caspian Sea and includes representatives from judiciaries of countries whose human rights records fall well below anything that would be acceptable in western Europe.

In a test case, those individuals have ruled that, as a society, we have to restrict the opportunities to retain DNA, fingerprints and photographs. We are bound by that, and I am not happy that we are bound by it. I am not even happy that we are part of the European Union. I voted no 30 or 40 years ago, and I would still vote no today. Involvement in the internal affairs of our society has gone way beyond a European common market and is now becoming a European federal system. However, we are stuck, we are in it, we have signed up to that convention, and they have ruled in a test case that we have to take action. Within that judgement, we should go as far as possible to retain what we can, which is what we are trying to do as a party.

I congratulate Mr Elliott on his speech and appreciate what he said. He is absolutely right. Unfortunately, I also have to congratulate Mr Dickson. It grieves me to do that because the last time I did so, he put out what I had done to several thousand Twitter followers, so I was branded. No sooner had I said it and checked my Twitter messages than there he was saying it, and the whole world knew about it. He will do the same today.

We are trying to push the boat out as far as we can within the terms of a judgement that we do not accept in the first place. However, we are stuck with it. That judgement certainly does not force the Northern Ireland Executive and the Minister of Justice to destroy photographs. So the Sinn Féin amendment is totally unacceptable, and we will vote against it.

What are we going to do? Sadly, the vast majority of young individuals who are cautioned are guilty in the sense that the police apprehend them for a crime to which they admit, and there is absolutely no doubt. A police officer is not making that decision. On the basis of the person being guilty, a police officer is deciding on the best way to deal with the situation. Do we give him a caution?

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Agnew: I come back to the issue of evidence. Young people, as they mature, make mistakes, and bringing them into the juvenile justice system very often makes them more likely to reoffend. Given the Member's commitment to evidence, does he agree that the logical follow-on is that we should not caution young people at all?

Mr Wells: I am not a complete Luddite so I can understand how a police officer, faced with a certain set of circumstances, decides that the best way to deal with that case is through a caution. However, several years down the line, it will be found that the vast majority of hardened criminals started in their teens. If, under caution, you can take DNA, fingerprints and photographic evidence, you will have the evidence to catch those people if, sadly, they become hardened criminals.

Implicit in what Mr McCartney is saying, and with which the nodding donkeys of the SDLP agree, is that, somehow, that evidence will be abused. What I am waiting for, from the combined brains of the opposition, is one piece of evidence or indication of any case in the United Kingdom in which DNA evidence has been tampered with, manipulated or used to convict someone who is entirely innocent. That is implicit in what they are saying about the retention of that material.

The overwhelming evidence, particularly in sexual crime, where DNA is frequently used in evidence, is that many dangerous, evil men who are behind bars would not be there had there not been DNA evidence. Without going into the mechanics of it, a DNA trace is often left after some horrible rape or sexual assault.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Agnew: I come back again to the distinction made in the Bill. I asked Mr McCartney to give way just as he sat down, so I did not find out whether he supports the distinction, but I certainly do. For certain listed crimes, such as rape, DNA will be retained for the reasons that the Member outlined. It is important to make those distinctions. It is not all or nothing; distinctions can legitimately be made.

Mr Wells: The Member for North Down has to realise that it is absolutely inconceivable that a serious sexual crime would be disposed of by means of a caution. You are not going to catch the criminal at the stage of their being cautioned, when it is more likely that he or she has smashed a pensioner's window, caused damage to some vulnerable person's car, or something like that. That is where the caution is likely to be exercised; certainly not in the case of a serious sexual assault. The problem is that, if that individual goes on to commit a really serious crime, you tie police officers' hands behind their backs if you do not allow them access to the latest technology.

DNA has the potential to revolutionise how we detect crime in Northern Ireland. The Committee went to Carrickfergus and saw some of the evidence. The level of evidence that can now be achieved from the tiniest fragment of DNA is extraordinary. You see how the scientists can enhance DNA —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. There are considerable levels of so-called antisocial behaviour — low-level criminality — in some constituencies. Mr Maginness will be well aware that there are many pockets of it in North Belfast. People in the lower Falls are being terrorised in their homes because of so-called joyriding and car theft, which, I understand, occurred at 10.00 am at the weekend. What would those people think about what their representatives advocate today, following on from their refusal to support the National Crime Agency (NCA) a few weeks ago, refusing to give all the teeth that are needed — *[Interruption.]* The Members may laugh, but the people living in those areas, who contact my constituency office as well as yours, are fed up with how they are being treated and with their views being ignored by their so-called representatives.

Mr Wells: Had I been allowed to wander further down the road before the Deputy Speaker caught me, I would have mentioned the NCA issue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the Member to come back to the Bill. *[Laughter.]* This time, he should not go further on down the road.

Mr Wells: I did not do that because I knew that I would have been stopped immediately in my tracks.

There has been a change in attitudes to policing in my constituency. I went to a meeting with the police in a strongly nationalist estate in Downpatrick. The meeting was packed, and people were screaming at the police. What was interesting is that they were screaming that they wanted more officers on the beat, more patrols and a higher police presence in the area because they were being tortured by young hoodlums and vandals who were often from their community.

That was a bit of a paradox but also a very encouraging development. People were not screaming to claim police bias or to complain that the Catholic community was being downtrodden. That was not the case; they just wanted a bigger police presence. I am absolutely certain that, as the honourable Member for North Belfast said, those individuals would react very badly if their public

representatives failed to allow the police to have the weapons that they need to carry out their difficult task.

5.45 pm

It is very frustrating that, sometimes, when you meet the police, they tell you that they often know the identity of the person who has carried out a crime but that they unfortunately do not have the evidence to convict. The whole community, including the dogs on the street, as they say, know who carried out the crime. Therefore, why would we deny them the resource that has been developed at great expense throughout the world to enable them to detect those individuals? That is the issue.

Finally, and I will finish with this, people who get their DNA taken, receive a caution and do not reoffend have absolutely nothing to worry about. Would someone please tell me how, if that evidence were retained indefinitely, it could be abused? If you never came to the PSNI's attention again, why would they need to go back to their labs, bring out that material and use it?

Mr McCartney mentioned my experience. I have nothing to worry about. They can keep my DNA until the cows come home, because I hopefully will never commit a crime where they are going to need it. If I do something that requires them to bring that material out and test it again, I will deserve exactly what I get, because I will have committed a crime. However, I have nothing to fear, and the vast majority of ordinary, decent citizens who have had DNA profiles retained have nothing to fear.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr D Bradley: The Member made a very strong speech on law and order. I would be more convinced by his speech had his party condemned the illegal protests that took place, many of which ended up with —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr D Bradley: — people petrol bombing police.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. We are dealing with a Bill, not protests or any other issue. I ask the Member to retake his seat and the other Member to finish.

Mr D Bradley: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. You allowed Mr Wells a fair degree of latitude on these issues.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: First, I did not allow any latitude. Secondly, I would advise you not to challenge the Chair.

Mr Wells: I think that the Principal Deputy Speaker may react so badly to that challenge that he may resign from this Assembly in the next few weeks, such will be his hurt about what you said to him. You will be responsible for that.

The Committee has argued this point ad nauseam. If truth be known, we got absolutely nowhere in reaching an agreement. I have to accept that. We are going to argue it ad nauseam again here this evening, and, unfortunately, we are not going to reach an agreement. You will never shift Sinn Féin on this. I accept that. For very obvious historical reasons it fears DNA.

I suggest that the SDLP and the Green Party rethink where they are going. The one thing that I am determined that we should not do is to put ourselves —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way on that point?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr A Maginness: The SDLP amendment is all about cautions, and the SDLP has shifted ground on cautions. We have said yes to five years' retention, while the previous situation would probably have meant indefinite retention. I think that the parties on the opposite Benches should reconsider their position so that they can have a more nuanced or balanced position and take into consideration the very reasonable points that Mr Agnew, the SDLP and, dare I say it, Sinn Féin made on the whole position on cautions and people who have been charged and not convicted.

Mr Wells: As far as our group changing its view on this particular issue, pigs might fly.

I suggest to the Member that the removal of the petition of concern would help matters enormously. I think that that is the problem. I have no difficulty with him opposing what we are suggesting, but I think that it is a problem to use a petition of concern while knowing the seriousness of the consequences for the legislation. Maybe his party will wish to reflect on that between now and next Monday. I think that that is a very dangerous precedent to set. However —

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Certainly.

Mr Poots: This party has been criticised before for using petitions of concern. The SDLP is making this a sectarian issue, and that reflects very poorly on it, in that we have a nationalist block opposing this. The SDLP and the Green Party have demonstrated that they are soft on crime and soft on the causes of crime. Sinn Féin always courted the criminals.

Mr Wells: That is a clear and succinct encapsulation of the situation that we are in. It disappoints but does not surprise me, given the trend that we have seen of the SDLP drifting further and further into the Sinn Féin camp. The Principal Deputy Speaker will no doubt stop me at any second, so I will drift away from that.

We have an opportunity to rethink, because we are coming back to this on Monday. I hope that wiser counsel will prevail and that we can reach a sensible conclusion on this — one that does not pander to those who, frankly, fear any technology that is available and any new techniques to prevent the criminal. Many of them were up to their neck in criminality for many years.

Mr Ford: I am tempted after that last exchange between Mr Maginness and Mr Wells to say that, instead of each of them suggesting that the other should be reasonable and agree with them, they should both suggest that everybody agree with the Minister. However, I have no expectation of that happening.

One point has been floating around the Chamber for some considerable time, and it started with Mr McCartney's opening remarks. I have absolutely no reason to believe that the proposals I am putting forward in the Bill and in the amendments that I have tabled are, in any way, not compliant with the Assembly's obligations under human

rights legislation. Mr McCartney asked me that question, and I give him that straight answer.

The first issue raised by most Members who spoke was that of photographs. Amendment Nos 18, 19 and 31 were tabled by Mr McCartney and his colleagues, who want photographs to be brought within the retention framework and made subject to the same destruction rules as DNA and fingerprints.

The photographing of suspects and the use, disclosure and retention of such photographs is provided for in section 64A of PACE and is applied in the same way as under the equivalent provisions in England and Wales. That statutory provision is supplemented by guidance on the management of police information provided by the National Policing Improvement Agency on behalf of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). That sets out the processes that support the principles set out in the management of police information (MoPI) code of practice.

That came to the attention of the courts in England and Wales last June in the case of R (RMC and FJ) v the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The case in question, which has been referred to already, involved the retention by the Metropolitan Police of the photographs of two individuals. On that occasion, the court was not satisfied that the existing policy struck a fair balance between the competing public and private interests or met the requirements of proportionality.

Lord Justice Richards, in the High Court of England and Wales, declared the policy as set out in the code of practice and guidelines unlawful, but allowed a reasonable further period within which to revise that policy. He stopped short of directing the destruction of the photographs without allowing the possibility of reassessment under a revised policy. I stress that that judgement was not, in any way, a reflection on PACE.

Following the judgement, ACPO set up a working group, on which the PSNI is represented, to bring the MoPI guidelines and the retention and use of photographs under them into compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. That work is under way, and the PSNI will implement the outcome. I intend to let the police see that through to its conclusion and do not intend to bring photographs within the retention framework at this time.

Let me repeat some of the key points on that: the human rights and professional standards committee of the Policing Board is following the issue and has undertaken to keep it under review; the issue of photographs is being addressed by a police working party; and the court did not prescribe a legislative solution but directed the police to revise the policy, which is work in hand. Very specifically, given that we discussed legislative consent motions earlier, a decision of the English High Court is not binding on Northern Ireland courts, although it is generally regarded as persuasive.

I am satisfied that an administrative solution can be a satisfactory way of dealing with the issue. I intend to let that work take its course. I remind the House that photographs are not included in the retention framework in Scotland, which is regarded as the exemplar of good practice in these islands, nor in England and Wales, so I do not believe that it is necessary to bring photographs into the retention framework in Northern Ireland at this time. I therefore oppose amendment Nos 18, 19 and 31.

I turn now to some of the amendments that I am bringing forward, starting with Amendment No 20. Article 63C currently provides that fingerprints and a DNA profile may be retained until the conclusion of an investigation or any related proceedings. However, it was pointed out during the Committee Stage that an individual might be excluded from an investigation relatively quickly, but the investigation itself could remain open, potentially for several years. The policy intention in relation to that article was that the material could be retained until it had been established that it was of no evidential value to the investigation, in relation to either the person from whom it was taken or any other person.

Amendment No 20 to article 63C will tie retention to the perceived utility of the material, rather than the conclusion of the investigation, and will require it to be disposed of once it is clear that retention no longer serves any useful purpose. That seems to me to be an entirely proportionate approach. While I am talking about that, earlier in the debate I undertook to give the statistics on the number of people likely to be included in the database. In round figures, in Northern Ireland the database currently holds something like 5% of the population. Under the new framework, that will be reduced to 4%. Under the new arrangements in Scotland it is 6%, and in England and Wales it will be 8%. In the USA it is 3·5%, and in France it is 1·4%.

There is no doubt that, while the databases in the UK generally are something like three times the European average, they have proven to be 20 times more efficient in terms of dealing with it. For example, we have seen in recent years that the database in Northern Ireland — of course, it is not the database that convicts people; it is police investigation and a full evidence base that convicts people — has provided 700 investigative leads to the PSNI in recent years which they would not otherwise have. If we are serious about fighting crime, that is an entirely reasonable and proportionate position to take.

I have already indicated that I will not be moving amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26 at this stage, although the Chair has already detailed the issues as to why I believe that they would be an appropriate and proportionate way forward.

The first part of amendment No 34 makes the changes required to article 89 of PACE, making any order to revise the circumstances subject to the affirmative procedure in this place and not simply the negative resolution procedure. As previously indicated, the prescribed circumstances will focus on cases where the alleged victim of the offence was, at the time of the offence, a juvenile, a vulnerable adult or associated with the person to whom the biometric material relates. When cases do not engage those criteria, the Chief Constable will also be able to apply to retain material where he is satisfied that the grounds exist to do so in the interests of the protection of the public.

At an earlier stage I undertook to explore the merits of making applications for retention of material in the prescribed circumstances subject to the approval of the courts, rather than the commissioner. Amendment Nos 22, 23 and 25 from Mr McCartney and his colleagues are aimed at achieving that result. Following discussions between my officials and representatives of the Police Service and the Courts and Tribunals Service, it is apparent that, without experience of operating the new

framework, there is little clarity around the likely volume of cases and the consequent resource implications of that. However, there is a general sense that it is likely to be significant when the new framework is first implemented and historical abuse inquiries are processed, along with other cases, but the workload may tail off over time. I therefore propose to proceed with the appointment of a commissioner for the moment, but will keep the matter under review.

A number of points have been made around the application to the courts rather than a commissioner. One of the key issues, which has already been highlighted by Stewart Dickson, is that, if the courts were to accept the task, although reporting restrictions could be imposed, hearings would be in public and there would be a requirement for an applicant to make representations in court in public, with — as was said very tellingly — the risk of public opinion reaching a different view on innocence than that which would be in the formal determination. That could well undermine the willingness of some people to make such representations — people who were justified in doing it.

It is extremely noteworthy that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission had no problem with the appointment of a biometric commissioner, as it could make for more efficient operation of the state, given that we cannot go to the courtroom every single time. That is a view that has been expressed by some of the responsible NGOs dealing with the issue.

The commissioner, of course, would be a public authority within the definition in section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which makes it unlawful to act in a way that is incompatible with convention rights. That would mean that any applicant dissatisfied with the hearing by the commissioner would have the opportunity to seek a judicial review.

On that basis, I believe that it is appropriate to continue with a biometric commissioner rather than leave all the issues to the courts. It would be in the better interests of justice to do so, and I am therefore opposed to amendment Nos 22, 23 and 25.

6.00 pm

A general issue around these points has been raised on the presumption of innocence. Some of the suggestions that have been made have gone beyond the actual realities of the European Court judgements. I certainly do not believe that we should presume that every person who has been arrested is a criminal, and the Bill does not do so. It provides for the retention of materials in certain specified and limited circumstances. In particular, those who are arrested for a serious offence and are charged but not convicted will only have material retained for three years with the potential for a further two years on application to the court. Only in cases of conviction for a recordable offences will material be retained indefinitely, as is currently the position and has been held to be out of line with ECHR requirements in the context of judgements relating to England and Wales and Northern Ireland.

I believe that the Marper judgement has shown that we can deal with that adequately by following broadly the Scottish pattern. The Marper judgement was concerned solely with indefinite retention from those who were not convicted. It was specifically in that regard that paragraph 109 of the Marper judgement stated:

> *"the Scottish Parliament voted to allow retention of the DNA of unconvicted persons only in the case of ... violent or sexual offences and even then, for three years only, with the possibility of an extension to keep the DNA sample and data for a further two years with the consent of a sheriff."*

Paragraph 110 continues:

> *"This position is notably consistent with Committee of Ministers' Recommendation R(92)1, which stresses the need for an approach which discriminates between different kinds of cases and for the application of strictly defined storage periods for data, even in more serious cases".*

Clearly, therefore, the court did envisage retention from unconvicted persons in certain circumstances. That is what we are applying in the legislation.

There is no doubt that, as the research suggests, those who have been arrested but not convicted have a significantly higher risk of being convicted of a future offence than otherwise similar individuals who have not previously been arrested. That risk does not diminish to the same level as in the general population until a period of between three and five years.

Mr Wells: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ford: I will give way to the Member.

Mr Wells: Does the Minister accept that that totally demolishes the argument being made by the SDLP and Sinn Féin representatives? We rest our case.

Mr Ford: Although Mr Wells is absolutely correct on that, the fact that it refers to those who have been arrested but not convicted having a significantly higher risk does not necessarily tie in with the remarks that he made earlier in the debate when, I believe, he said that the vast majority of young offenders go on to offend further. That is equally lacking in evidence. I am grateful for his support for my position, but I am afraid that I cannot support the remarks that he made earlier.

The position is clear: if conviction is not the outcome, it is only in cases involving serious offences that material will be retained and only for a limited period. Retention in cases involving an arrest but no charge will require that independent consent. That is proportionate.

One of the cases that has been quoted — it is a case that has been made by the police — concerns issues where allegations of rape have been made by different women against one individual. It may be something that happens late on a Friday or Saturday night, when the individuals are unable to give particularly good evidence on the basis of their state of intoxication and where it may well be the case that the alleged perpetrator alleges that the sex was consensual. In those circumstances, where similar allegations are being made, retaining a DNA sample and a fingerprint sample in the absence of charges seems to me to be potentially a most appropriate and proportionate way to deal with the potential of future offending. It would not apply in every case in which an allegation is made but in serious cases in which there is strong evidence. It is not about deprivation of liberty or having a criminal record but

a limited retention of DNA and fingerprints for three years and possibly an additional two years on application to the court. I believe that that is justified and proportionate.

I will now turn to the area of juvenile cautions and, in particular, amendment Nos 29 and 33, which were tabled by Mr Maginness. As introduced, new article 53B of PACE, inserted by paragraph 3 of schedule 3 to the Bill, treats cautions as convictions for the purposes of the retention of DNA profiles and fingerprints, which would allow material to be retained indefinitely. That is because, for a caution to be awarded, the individual concerned must admit to the offence in question. There is mitigation for juveniles built into that. As with a conviction, if it is a first minor offence, the material may not be held indefinitely but for a period of between five and 10 years only, depending on the length of the sentence. However, on conviction or caution for a second offence, material from juveniles may be held indefinitely.

Concerns have been raised with me and my officials and in evidence to the Committee for Justice around the proportionality of allowing indefinite retention in the case of a juvenile who is given two cautions. Mr Maginness has tabled amendment Nos 29 and 33, which would decouple juvenile cautions from the indefinite retention provision and, instead, create a free-standing provision that any caution awarded to a juvenile would attract retention for a maximum of five years in each case. Cautions awarded to those aged 18 years or over would be unaffected. In his remarks, Mr Maginness outlined the different ways in which cautions are treated across different aspects of the justice system, which creates an inconsistency whichever way we deal with it.

Mr Maginness also talked, although not in reference to his formal amendment, about the issue of a clean slate at 18 and the youth justice review. There is a danger that, if we simply talk about a clean slate at 18, it could mean that a 17-year-old might have a clean slate after only a few weeks whereas, in the same circumstances, a 13-year-old would have the record retained for five years. That would be an anomaly, and I hope that he will not proceed with an amendment in that context.

In the context of the framework as a whole, I believe that amendment Nos 29 — the new article 63HA — and 33, tabled by Mr Maginness, will be appropriate and proportional. I will support them.

I turn again to some of my amendments around diversionary youth conferencing and penalty notices. I intend to bring those two further proposals into the framework. Diversionary youth conferences, like cautions, may be employed only in circumstances where an individual admits to the commission of an offence. I propose, therefore, to treat those in the same way as is now proposed for juvenile cautions, allowing retention for a maximum of five years in each case. Amendment No 27 incorporates those provisions as new article 63HB.

Secondly, the provisions in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 introducing penalty notices were brought into force on 6 June last year. Such notices should now be brought within the retention framework where the individual concerned has been arrested in connection with a recordable offence. Amendment No 28 will, therefore, add new article 63HC permitting retention in such cases for a period of two years only. That is consistent with the position in Scotland, England and Wales.

I do not intend to speak to amendment No 30, since Mr McCartney has indicated that he will not move it.

I turn then to amendment No 32. The Committee Chair has acknowledged that this relates to a technical issue raised by Forensic Science Northern Ireland about the definition of a DNA sample. It is appropriate that we have that definition, in line with its advice, to ensure that the statement is simply that a sample is a sample taken for the purpose of deriving a profile. That is technical language, but it is the appropriate way of handling the issue.

Finally, the second part of amendment No 34 — I referred to the first part earlier — corrects a drafting error in paragraph 6 of schedule 3 to the Bill. That error escaped the legislative draftsman until now, and I do not think that any comment has been made on it.

I trust that is a satisfactory summary of the differing views. I believe that the proposals as they stand in my name, both the existing Bill and my amendments, and those put forward by Mr Maginness are an appropriate, proportional and rational way of moving forward. I thank the Members who contributed to the debate from different directions. I also repeat my thanks to my staff and the Committee for the work that they have done so far.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank everyone who has spoken in the debate. I want to briefly restate a number of issues and address a couple of points that have been made. Nothing that I have heard today has shaken our belief that this has to be based on the principle of presumption of innocence. That is a principle on which we test all that we do and —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes, sure.

Mr Agnew: I made this point when I was addressing Mr Wells. He raised the issue of rape, and, as the Minister pointed out, there is a compelling reason for treating that as a different case. I am interested to hear the Member's view on that in relation to the presumption of innocence.

Mr McCartney: I covered that earlier this afternoon, although perhaps you were not here. I said that there are situations in which DNA found on someone after a serious sexual offence or serious assault should be retained. We have said that, despite what is said sometimes from the other side. I will not make too many comments about that.

I have said on a number of occasions — I have tested it throughout the Committee Stage — that we have a concern based on some of the things that some officials have said to us that this will not be fully compliant with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights and that we will find ourselves back before the court. I heard the Minister stating unequivocally that it is wholly compliant and that there are no concerns in his Department or among any of his officials that it is not fully compliant and will not be seen in that light in the future. That is on the record, and we may want to come back to that.

The reason that we tabled the amendment about the presumption of innocence was the answer from officials on a number of occasions at Committee Stage. Those answers were prompted by questions from Basil McCrea,

who at that time was, I assume, representing Ulster Unionist Party policy. He was told by an official that one of the reasons why DNA can be retained, should be retained and will be retained is when there is sufficient suspicion of an individual.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Wells: I knew that the ghost of Basil McCrea would haunt us at some stage in the debate. I assure you that the authentic voice of the Ulster Unionist Party on the issue was articulated by Mr Elliott. It certainly was not articulated by Mr McCrea, who, once again, went on one of his solo runs.

Mr McCartney: It is interesting that you are often accused of going on a solo run when you say something worthwhile. I understand why you are trying to put that to the side and say that, because Basil McCrea is no longer a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, what he asked at the Committee is not relevant, but I do not see it like that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to return to the Bill.

Mr McCartney: This is about the Bill, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

You may want to set aside what Mr McCrea asked in Committee, but the official referred — these are his words — to "sufficient suspicion of an individual". Therefore, those tasked with framing the Bill and taking it forward say that they want to be able to retain DNA if they have sufficient suspicion of an individual. That may be despite the investigator not taking the case to the prosecution service or the prosecution service taking the case and saying, "No case to answer". Alternatively, you may go to court and be found not guilty. That will still not be good enough. Officials want another category for those who, it says, are sufficiently suspicious. That is why we are very firm on the presumption of innocence.

Along with other members, I raised in Committee the issue of the size and extent of the database on 28 June 2012. This is the first rebuttal that we have had. Perhaps the Minister will provide us with the statistics that he has used today and state their source, as it will be interesting to see the source. He said that the PSNI had informed him that there were 700 investigative leads from DNA. We have not been told, even though it would have illuminated the debate — perhaps we can return to it — the number of cases in which the DNA used was in the data bank legitimately through other aspects of the judicial process. Another question that was not answered was this: how many of those leads led to prosecutions? Answers to those questions would help us to illuminate the debate and come to conclusions. However, we have been left hanging as if to say, "There you are: 700 leads". Somehow, that is seen as promoting your argument. Sometimes, what you do not say takes away from the argument that you are trying to promote.

6.15 pm

The issue of photographs did not come out of the blue. Mr Wells said that it was discussed in Committee, and so it was. It came from the Department, not from Sinn Féin. An official accepted that there is the potential for a legal challenge when it comes to photographs. Another departmental official said:

> *"It is for the police to get their own house in order on the issue of photographs. They recognise that ... there is the potential for a legal challenge when it comes to photographs."*

The police accept that they are open to a challenge and they have to get their house in order. We are here to put a legislative framework in place that allows other people to put their house in order. That is why photographs are included in the Bill. It is not because we thought it up but because the Department nearly instructed us that it was perhaps a good thing to do.

Tom Elliott felt that I did not address the issue of the biometric commissioner. I will explain it to him, although I do not want to make this any longer than necessary. When the Minister indicated that he was removing the amendments, we felt that it was perhaps not appropriate to give the reasons why we thought that it was inappropriate. The Minister said that he is open to suggestions, and perhaps the Committee will return to that. However, our reason is very simple: we believe that that is what the courts are for. If somebody wants to test legislation, we should use the courts rather than set up another commissioner. We have surveillance commissioners and all sorts of commissioners, and a lot of people say that they usurp the authority of the courts.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member's giving way. I thought that, in my outline of the way that the commission would operate and be subject to the potential for judicial review, I made it clear that it would in no way take away the rights of the courts to determine an issue but would take away a large volume of work and would, hopefully, not require anything like the same input of resources. That would allow matters to be considered in private rather than in the public gaze with its potential implications for applicants.

Mr McCartney: I understand your logic. The point is well made, but there is an assumption that there will be a large volume. Therefore, when you try — perhaps we all do it — to make the case, you make out that the problem will be bigger than it perhaps will be. However, I argue on the principle that the courts are there to provide for such challenges and we should use them.

Steven Agnew raised a point. He is away, but we covered that in the main commentary.

Jim Wells is Jim Wells, as the saying goes. He had a contention about something that was not said. I have often heard that people have been convicted for what they say; I have never heard of convictions, even in the Diplock courts, for something that you did not say, but that is another day's work. He has the idea that we are somehow suggesting that the DNA can be tampered with and that might lead to false prosecutions and so on. We never said that once. The only person who said it today was you, so maybe your own mind needs disentangled on the ability of people to do that in a mischievous way. I said and we continue to say that our opposition is based on two planks: that it undermines the principle of presumption of innocence and that we do not feel that it will be fully compliant with the ECHR.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will give way.

Mr Wells: I am glad that the Member has made that point. What can possibly go wrong if the DNA is stored in a secure unit somewhere in Northern Ireland and is only ever brought out when there is an indication that that person has been involved in criminal activity? What is his issue? He is not even alleging that the police would tamper with it, abuse it or use it to falsely convict someone. He is underlining my point that the ordinary Joe Citizen who does not cause a crime or do anything wrong has absolutely nothing to fear.

Mr McCartney: There is always a case where people do not listen to what you are saying. You are creating a category that says that a person is sufficiently suspicious. If a person has been arrested and released, that, in our opinion, is the way that it should be in every aspect of life. There should be no special category of "We think that you are sufficiently suspicious".

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I will give way.

Mr Wells: There is a direct parallel to this, which his party has signed up to. Access Northern Ireland can provide several levels of intelligence to various organisations when they apply for information. It can provide the hard intelligence, which is convictions. It can provide the medium level of detail, which is prosecutions that did not lead to conviction. It can provide the soft intelligence, which is that allegations have been made about an individual that may make him or her an unsuitable person to look after children. The Member does not resent that, and that is done to protect children from adults who may be inappropriate. So how can he argue that it is inappropriate in this case?

Mr McCartney: There are two things to be said about that. First, we have opposed the use of soft intelligence, and, indeed, we have supported many people who have taken cases about the use of soft intelligence, secret evidence and evidence that cannot be contested in court and won. Our position is very clear: if it is so open, why can it not be tested? We do not agree with the employment circumstances of the past in which people were denied employment perhaps because their father's father's father was once interned without trial. At the time, that was "acceptable". We say that it is not, and we will ensure that there are safeguards to protect people in that circumstance in the future.

I see that Mr Humphrey is also absent. In a number of interventions, he asked how the people of the Falls Road would view our position. He said that they would not view it very kindly, and the basis of his contention was that he got a couple of phone calls from people on the Falls Road. To me, the best test of all of this is, as Gregory Campbell said last week, the people. Let the people decide. I will use Gregory Campbell as my reference for Mr Humphrey. I will not rely on a couple of phone calls from anywhere to tell me that what I am doing is right, wrong or indifferent. We will let the people decide.

Mr Poots gave us a bit of a lecture on the use of the petition of concern. In many ways, he made a good point about whether it is being used in circumstances for which it was perhaps not designed. That is a fair point, and perhaps we as an Assembly could revisit how the petition of concern should be used in the future. I suppose that I would say this, but, in this instance, I believe that it is a correct use because the issue is in and around equality. In the previous mandate, the sexual offender notification clauses of the previous Justice Bill were taken through Committee Stage right up to Further Consideration Stage. They were supported and voted through by everyone, and, at the last minute, a couple of weeks before the election, the DUP put down a petition of concern. We are back now with the same legislation. Throughout Committee Stage, the departmental officials and the four DUP representatives accepted that the Bill had not changed in any real sense since the previous mandate. Therefore, if this were being tested by a jury — a rare thing in these parts sometimes — it might come to the conclusion that it was a bit of an abuse of the petition of concern procedure.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I will, surely.

Mr Givan: I appreciate the comment that the Member makes. In that sense, he is right. The petition of concern is used in the House in a manner not envisaged when those who signed up to the Belfast Agreement decided to put it in. If Members, particularly those from the nationalist community, who often lecture this side of the House on abusing the petition of concern procedure want to convince us that we should use it more appropriately, surely you need to start practising what you preach rather than putting down a petition of concern. Why is the retention of the DNA of people who may be suspected of crime of particular nationalist concern? Why is that relevant only to the nationalist community and not to the broader community?

Mr McCartney: That is a point well made, and perhaps we can have that discussion. On the sexual offender clauses, that was not a concern to the DUP in this mandate but it was in the previous one. I am trying to point out that there is no point in saying to Members that they are abusing the petition of concern as if you are sitting in some sort of whited sepulchre. I do not think that there are too many whited sepulchres in this place.

I will just finish on this point. Stewart Dickson referred to amendment No 30. We took that off. I did not move it, because the departmental officials pointed out an unintended consequence of our amendment. That shows that, when people come with a reasoned argument, we are prepared to change our mind.

Mr Ford: Sometimes.

Mr McCartney: The Minister is speaking from a sedentary position. We are prepared to listen to reason, but there are principles on which we base our arguments and contentions. Jim Wells can get up and wax lyrical and try to throw what he perceives to be insults, but, I have to say and I have said it before —

Mr Wells: They were insults.

Mr McCartney: They may have been, but I just wanted to point that out to you. I heard you talking about the environment and congratulating Steven Agnew, but, as you know, hot air only rises, and most of what you said today rose to nowhere.

Question put, That amendment No 18 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 37; Noes 50.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCartney and Ms McCorley

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lunn and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment No 19 because it is consequential to amendment No 18, which has not been made. Amendment No 20 has already been debated.

Amendment No 20 made: In page 15, line 14, leave out from "the conclusion" to end of line 17 and insert

"the Chief Constable determines that the material is of no evidential value in relation to—

(a) the investigation of the offence; or

(b) proceedings against any person for the offence." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Bill for today. The Business Committee has agreed that the remainder of this stage of the Bill will be scheduled for next Monday, 25 February.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members to resume their seat or leave the Chamber quietly.

The proposer of the Adjournment topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately six minutes.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to speak on the proposal to develop a shared education campus at the vacated British Army site at Lisanelly in Omagh, County Tyrone. Members present will know that the campus is a top priority for Omagh and, indeed, for west Tyrone, owing to the multiple benefits that the project can provide for the children and future generations.

Lisanelly is an unprecedented opportunity to transform a 140-acre site, which has been derelict and vacated for the past number of years, into a new source of hope and achievement for the future. To date, a mountain of work has been undertaken to get the project to where it is today. Indeed, there is widespread support from all sections of the community for the development of the shared campus, which could contain schools from a wide range of sectors. They would work together, while retaining their distinct ethos and identity.

The campus has the potential to provide modern post-primary education provision and will include first-class educational facilities for up to 3,000 or more pupils in a more co-ordinated and effective way than is now possible. It will also enable local schools to embrace the curriculum changes and meet the targets of the entitlement framework.

School projects can be developed and delivered together with facilities, planned in a way that allows the schools to collaborate and work together. By collaborating, the schools can avail themselves of state-of-the-art facilities that would not be possible if they stood alone.

An excellent example of that was highlighted during the launch of the master plan in 2010. The example provided, which related to the schools of activity, stated that there was the potential to provide 3G covered pitches, with stadium-style spectator facilities. That is one example that was given of what can happen when schools pull together. The collaborative nature of the project will ensure value for money, while providing first-class facilities for the young people of Omagh. The model represents a template for shared education that can potentially be implemented in many other areas.

The project board has engaged extensively with schools, young people, parents, educationalists, business leaders and the wider community, and the consultations have indicated that there is widespread, significant support for the campus, particularly among our young people. In fact, I am told that, during one of the recent consultation

workshops that were held as part of local democracy week, young people expressed a great deal of impatience that the project was not moving faster than it was. The brochure from the launch of the master plan provides a snapshot of some of the comments that were made. I will just read some of them. One refers to it as:

"an amazing chance that should not be missed".

Another says that it:

"could be a model for schools across the globe".

Another strongly supports it, but says that:

"individual identities must remain".

Another comment states that:

"shared facilities would mean that each school could have better access to much better facilities that each on their own could afford and sustain".

Another comment stated that:

"This is an exciting project and a fascinating opportunity for the young people of Omagh".

Another comment that I will share with you said:

"Keep the momentum going to make it happen as soon as possible."

6.45 pm

That is a snapshot of some of the opinions that were gathered, particularly from younger people, during one of the most recent consultations. Those are certainly the views that have prevailed right up until the present day.

In getting to the point that we are at now with the project, the transfer of the site into the ownership of the Department of Education was a major step forward in edging the project closer to reality. I am very familiar with that particular piece of work because, during that time, I worked as a personal assistant to my party's MP Pat Doherty, who played a central role in that particular campaign, which preceded my time as a MLA. I know of the hundreds of hours that Pat clocked up at countless meetings with Secretaries of State, Defence Secretaries, Ministers, MPs, TDs and MLAs from all backgrounds to keep the concept alive at a time when the site was in danger of slipping out of public control. I therefore want to pay tribute to Pat, who worked vigorously for many years to ensure that the site would come into public ownership.

I also want to pay tribute to Caitríona Ruane, who, in her capacity as Education Minister, enthusiastically embraced the concept of the shared campus at Lisanelly and played a central and hands-on role in advancing the project. I am glad to note that the current Minister, Mr O'Dowd, has continued the project with the same commitment and energy. His swift intervention in the case of Arvalee Special School during its hour of need in 2012, when the building was burned to the ground, is clear evidence of his commitment to the educational needs and well-being of young people in our district.

It is also important to note the excellent work of Omagh District Council; the Strategic Investment Board (SIB); the Western Education and Library Board (WELB); the Lisanelly schools working group, which was chaired by local church leaders; and Omagh business leaders, who have always been supportive of the project.

Although the main focus is, quite rightly, on the educational benefits, there are, indeed, wider benefits as well. For example, the campus will not only support and encourage excellent educational provision, but will provide an opportunity to promote regional balance and regeneration, which, of course, is in line with the Programme for Government commitments.

Lisanelly super output area is the single most deprived area in the entire Omagh district. It is located in the top 14% of the most deprived super output areas in the North. The construction of that huge development has the potential to create hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs in an industry that is under severe pressure. There is also the possibility of developing the vacated schools that are located in and around the town centre, which creates a very exciting possibility to make the town centre a more vibrant hub of economic activity. Of course, the concept of working and sharing together, which underpins Lisanelly, is something that is essential as we all strive towards a shared future together.

In conclusion, a Chathaoirligh, the construction of the campus will provide long-term social and pedagogic benefits for the children of Omagh. I believe that it could also usher in major positive economic and regeneration benefits for the entire community. It is an investment in the future. I congratulate the Minister for prioritising the project, coming here this evening and taking a hands-on role in helping to edge it forward. Lisanelly can offer a real vision for the future of how education can be delivered. All our children and young people deserve the best opportunities in the best surroundings.

Mr Buchanan: First of all, I thank the Minister for being in his place to listen to the debate, which is of the utmost importance to the future direction of education in Omagh.

When the Lisanelly site first became available for development, there was much interest in what type of development would be of most benefit to Omagh into the future. The concept of the education campus generated much debate and was welcomed by many in the education sector and others with an interest in the future education of our children in Omagh and, indeed, in the wider west of the Province.

Omagh District Council, along with the business community, the SIB, the working group, the Western Education and Library Board and others, has to date done a lot of work in promoting and seeking to get the development of the campus site under way. However, progress has been extremely slow, to the extent where confidence in the community is beginning to dwindle, with questions being asked about the Department's commitment and about whether this will ever come to fruition or whether it is simply pie in the sky. That is the feeling among some people in Omagh, and that is why I believe that this debate is so important.

We have schools in Omagh that are in dire need of a newbuild. The structure of those schools is abysmal, and, as a result, they are finding it more and more difficult to attract students. Take, for example, Omagh High School: its students recently excelled to great heights in educational attainment, but the building has far outlasted its lifespan and urgently requires a newbuild. The Sacred

Heart College is in the same position as far as a newbuild is concerned. We remember the destruction of Arvalee school following a fire at its premises before Christmas, which saw the pupils scattered over two or three different sites. Thankfully, it will soon be operating out of temporary accommodation back on its own site. Although that arrangement is all very well for the short term, a newbuild is a must in the longer term.

In light of all that, I must ask the Minister this evening what he and his Department are doing to speed the development of the campus site. What is holding up progress? Has the maintained sector handcuffed the Minister, not permitting him to make the necessary progress?

There also appears to be a problem with the area plan in the Western Education and Library Board, which is hindering progress on the detailed design of schools on the site. Until there is clarity on that issue, it is my understanding that the design work will remain on the shelf.

Phase 1 of the works, which entails the demolition of existing buildings and the modification of the site, is expected to take two years, but it has not even commenced. Perhaps the Minister can explain the reason for that delay. Construction of Arvalee school is a must, as I said. In conversation with those involved in the campus site development, I have been informed that phase 1 can commence and run in tandem with the completion of the area plan and design works as well as the development of Arvalee school, the business plan for which is currently with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

Therefore, I seek clarity from the Minister this evening on his commitment. It is all very well to say, "The Department is committed to this", but what is the level of that commitment? Is there something else that the Minister or the Department can, at some stage later down the line, turn to and say, "We would have delivered this, but x, y and z hindered us, and we were not able to deliver it"? What we need the Minister to do this evening is spell out for us what that commitment is. What does he mean when he says that he is committed to the campus site in Omagh? When can we expect to see phase 1 commence on site? When can we expect to see the area plan completed in order to allow the design works to continue? When can we expect to see the foundations laid on the site for Arvalee school?

That is one of the things that will give people confidence and let them see that the Department really is committed to this site. That is what we need to know this evening. There must be no ambiguity; rather, there needs to be clarity on this issue. It is no good if this goes on and on, and then, at some stage in the future, we are told, "We are sorry; although we were committed to it, something else held us back". Let us know now exactly what the situation is so that if it is not to develop and move forward, we can look to other areas for those schools that are in dire straits and which really need new builds in Omagh.

These things will clearly demonstrate a firm commitment from the Minister and the Department on the development of the site. I trust that when the Minister responds, he will clear up any ambiguity and give us clarity and timelines so we will know exactly what the situation is and when the site will be developed.

Mr Hussey: I also welcome the fact that the Minister is here. I congratulate Mr McAleer on securing the debate. I begin by declaring an interest as a member of the board of governors of Omagh High School.

When Lisanelly was an army barracks, it made a large economic input to Omagh because there were so many soldiers and jobs. The loss of the barracks has had major economic consequences for Omagh, which cannot be forgotten.

The link between Lisanelly and St Lucia barracks cannot be overlooked. We have had a debate on St Lucia, and Mr Buchanan asked the deputy First Minister a question about St Lucia yesterday. I asked a supplementary question. However, in response to Mr Buchanan, Mr McGuinness said:

> *"The development of the sites is critical".*

I would have said "are" critical; he said "is" critical. It is still critical for Omagh. He continued:

> *"In the event of there being an educational campus on the Lisanelly site, lands that are under our control at St Lucia could be made available to the education authorities". — [Official Report, This Bound Volume, p119, col 2].*

Given that that is the deputy First Minister's answer, is he implying that there will not be an educational campus on the Lisanelly site? He also said:

> *"The Department of Education has pushed forward decisively with what it wishes to do with the Lisanelly site. There will be further discussions between the Department and some of the local schools that are interested — and others that may be less interested — in locating to a campus that, I think, would provide a unique sharing arrangement in education." — [Official Report, This Bound Volume, p120, col 1].*

Mr McElduff and I were part of a political group that visited Drumragh Integrated College recently, which was, in its own right, a fascinating afternoon. There is no doubt that the young people of Omagh buy into the concept of an educational village.

Reference has been made to a local democracy event, which clearly shows that. I was a member of Omagh District Council from 2005; Mr McAleer and Mr McElduff were also members of the council, and, of course, Councillor Buchanan is still a member. Mr Byrne was a councillor in previous years. From 2005, members of the council, regardless of our political affiliation, joined together to push forward an educational campus at Lisanelly. That was Omagh District Council's vision. It is not a Sinn Féin, DUP, UUP or SDLP vision; it is an Omagh vision. This is what Omagh wants and expects.

Omagh High School has been sitting on the same site for over 50 years. I do not know whether the Minister has ever visited that school; as a board member and a politician, I obviously have visited. The school is falling down around people, yet it achieves some of the highest available scores because of the commitment of the staff. It is an excellent school, but the facilities are rubbish. Sacred Heart College brought together two schools several years ago, and it works very well. Again, the site is not perfect. Arvalee School and Resource Centre had the misfortune of having a terrible fire on its site, and pupils are now in temporary accommodation.

Three schools have agreed to move onto the Lisanelly campus, and three schools are undecided. I recently asked the Minister about the chairman of Omagh Academy's board of governors, who made it clear that that school no longer wants to be part of the project. Omagh Academy, Loreto Grammar School and the Christian Brothers Grammar School do not seem to want to play this game.

My advice is to leave them where they are. The three schools that need to move — Omagh High School, Sacred Heart College and Arvalee — need to be facilitated. We need an assurance today that they will be facilitated. We need work on the site.

7.00 pm

Mr Buchanan and Mr McAleer referred to the fact that confidence was dwindling. That is because we see a site, but that is all we see. When I was vice-chairman of the council, I was here with other councillors to help to promote the shared educational campus idea. For you, Minister, the shared educational campus theory can be put into practice. The shared educational campus will work because the schools can keep their own identity but, where necessary, share. We all want that concept to work, and Omagh could be the perfect example for the future. However, by doing nothing and allowing the delays to go on and on, confidence goes out the window.

I want an educational village in Omagh that is the example for every other town in Northern Ireland. Omagh has had its share of troubles and sorrows. We are in the west, but we cannot be forgotten. I ask you, Minister, to assure us that there will be movement on Lisanelly. Perhaps, before the end of this Assembly term —

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

Mr Hussey: — we will see some movement.

Mr Byrne: Like the other Members who have spoken, I thank Mr McAleer for securing a debate on this topic. It is timely and important that we have the debate at this juncture.

The proposed Lisanelly educational campus in Omagh is a model of schooling that could provide a significant new educational experience based on a unique example of building different schools on one campus rather than on individual sites. The proponents of the shared educational model believe it to be a good model for shared education into the future. Shared education would be achieved on a large integrated site or educational campus in which a range of schools could be sited beside one another.

The three grammar schools in Omagh — Loreto Grammar, Christian Brothers Grammar and Omagh Academy — and the other two secondary schools — Omagh High and Sacred Heart College — have all developed a strong educational history and legacy. Many former pupils and staff are proud of their school identity. Drumragh Integrated College, which recently got a new school, would also like to be on the new campus. Arvalee Special School could also be accommodated on the site, which would be desirable.

As Mr Hussey said, the three grammar schools are more self-conscious and, indeed, precious about their school history, educational legacy and reputation. They have been looking for a lot of reassurance about the independence of school character, governance structures and educational autonomy in a shared campus. Thus far, their boards of governors and trustees have been somewhat hesitant and, indeed, reluctant about committing to the project. Mr Hussey referred to the chairman of the board of governors of the academy. He spoke to me about his anxiety should the academy commit to the site and the other two grammar schools not do so.

Thus far, the advocates of the project and the project team have primarily advanced the shared campus as a building construction project with unique physical characteristics. There is still not an educational argument that is robust and convincing to all concerned, particularly for some school governors and trustees. I am convinced, as are others, but we have to get the trustees and governors of these other schools on board.

The plan proposes to build six secondary schools on a 140-acre site that could accommodate approximately 3,700 pupils. Each school would share sports facilities and some other services, but each would retain its identity, as was referred to. The cost of the project would be £100 million-plus, which would be a tremendous economic boost for Omagh and a tremendous educational project and development.

The shared campus approach could be a good model of area-based educational planning for Northern Ireland in the future. However, that is assuming that all schools plan to use the facility and agree to it collectively. A number of schools have been hesitant to move from their existing sites. What negotiations have been conducted with those schools? I asked the Minister recently what formal and informal discussions or consultations have been ongoing. It is important that the interests of pupils and parents, along with the views of governors and trustees, are fully explored and taken on board.

The pooling of subjects at AS and A level could be a positive development that would allow schools to meet the requirements of the common curriculum within the educational framework. I know that some schools already share some subjects, but that could be made easier for pupils if the schools were closer to each other. It is not fair to have, for example, four pupils from the Christian Brothers' school who are studying the minority subjects having to go a distance in the wet and rain to the convent or the academy. It makes much more sense to have those pupils on a single campus site.

A number of areas still need clarification. The questions that arise include asking which facilities, such as canteens, administrative functions or other services, will be shared. There is also the question of the Dean Maguirc College in Carrickmore. I think that there is still a very strong desire to retain a secondary school in the Carrickmore area. I know that there has been some discussion in the past about that school also becoming part of the campus site, but I think that there is still a very strong local feeling that the school in Carrickmore should exist on its own. As Mr Hussey said, that school, like Omagh High School and the Sacred Heart College, badly needs a new building. The Omagh High School and Sacred Heart College buildings are falling down.

My request is to the Minister this evening. There is a need for an educational project team — a core group of people and civil servants — to advance this case, to get on with the work and to end some of the uncertainty. I think that it is fair to say that the Reverend Herron and Monsignor

Donnelly have played a very strong role in trying to advance this project. They have co-ordinated a group of people in the Omagh area along with officials from the Western Education and Library Board, the former chief executive of that board and others. They have done a lot of good work, but, as Mr Buchanan said, the time has now come for some forward movement and some action.

I am convinced that a group of —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Byrne: — core civil servants should be put together to carry out the necessary consultations. Let us get on with the project.

Mr Storey: I want to make a contribution to this debate in support of my colleague Tom Buchanan. If possible, and as other Members alluded to, I also want to try to bring some clarity to the course of direction not only of the project in Omagh but of what may be the Department's possible trajectory, as it may want to roll this type of idea out in other places.

I am also glad that the Minister has joined us this evening. I hope that he has cooled down a little from Question Time. I do not know what tablets he was on or what the case was, but he certainly got rather excited. We will try not to annoy him too much this evening so that he can go home nice and calm.

The Education Committee visited the Lisanelly project, and we very much appreciated the hospitality, kindness and the warmth of the welcome that we received. I believe that it gave the Committee members who went an overview and a first-hand insight into the potential and possibility that could exist in the Lisanelly project. I want to place that on record.

When the Member introduced the debate tonight, I wondered whether he was going to give either a detailed analysis of where we were going or a eulogy to previous Education Ministers and the current Minister. Given all that he said that they have done, perhaps he was preparing them for the new year's honours list.

Despite all that, as we sit or stand in the Chamber tonight, we have a project that has not progressed in the way that was intended. We can skirt around that, hide it or try to dress it up, but Members know that that is not how I do business. My colleague Tom Buchanan referred to the questions that must be asked. Is the Minister handcuffed? Is he being curtailed?

Nobody has mentioned it, but let us remember that there was a court case. There was a school that said, "We ain't shifting", and it took the Department to court. We then had the appeal and the regrettable situation of the appeal judgement giving 50% of the argument to one side, and the same to the other. However, the question that needs answered is whether a section of the Catholic maintained sector is going to be allowed to delay educational provision in Omagh.

When I look at the Western Education and Library Board's area plan — the Minister placed great emphasis on ensuring that area plans were produced — what do I find? I find that:

> *"The Diocesan Programme Board has made the following overall recommendations for future post-primary education in the Derry Diocese."*

Are we working on the basis of a parish, a diocese or on the basis of making educational provision for the young people of Omagh? Who comes first?

I recently visited schools in the controlled sector in Omagh. There are concerns, fears, worries and apprehensions, but they know that possibly the only way that new capital provision will be made in the Omagh area is via the Lisanelly project. Why should they be allowed to sit in accommodation that is less than acceptable because others cannot make up their mind or have other issues — whether it is who owns the property, who makes the decision, whether it will be transfer based, and all of those things? While all of that goes on, we have a site that remains stagnant and is not being developed in the way that we would like.

The fact that Arvalee Special School will be rebuilt is to be welcomed. I too thank the Minister for taking on board that issue in the way that he has. We can all be thankful that that has happened. However, I conclude with this, and Members have referred to it this evening: let us have certainty and clarity. Let the Minister bring us up to date tonight on what he has been told and what discussions he has had with the maintained sector's diocesan board. Is it now committed to delivering a project with the potential to deliver on our and the Executive's objectives of creating shared education provision? With bated breath, we wait to hear about that from the Minister this evening.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ar dtús, ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a ghabháil le Déaglán Mac Giolla Uidhir as an ábhar seo a phlé os comhair an Tionóil inniu. I thank my constituency and party colleague Declan McAleer for securing the debate, which gives West Tyrone MLAs and the Chair of the Education Committee an opportunity to raise pertinent questions.

As other Members detailed, the Omagh shared educational campus has certainly caught the imagination. It is an iconic project and I, too, praise the leadership of the Rev Robert Herron, Monsignor Joseph Donnelly, the Western Education and Library Board, Omagh District Council and Pat Doherty MP, who were strongly supported by the Department of Education and strongly led, too, by the Strategic Investment Board and, not least, by programme director, Hazel Jones. Successive Ministers have also demonstrated their enthusiasm and support for a vision of integrating and sharing education, while protecting the individual ethos of the schools in question. It is about the efficient and effective use of public resources. It would effectively tick every box if one was to map out an ideal future for post-primary educational provision in an area.

7.15 pm

I am aware that the Education Committee, as has been said here, visited the site. I am aware, too, that the Good Friday Agreement Implementation Committee of the Oireachtas has visited the site, and it has been discussed in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly as well, where Michael Mates seconded my proposal to the then British Secretary of State, Shaun Woodward, that it needed to

be transferred to the Executive. We were described in the Sunday 'Observer' as:

"the odd couple of Anglo-Irish politics".

Michael Mates pointed out that he was a British military officer who operated from the Lisanelly camp in the 1960s, so I cannot imagine that me, Ross Hussey or Michael Mates will agree on the past, but I think we will agree on the future.

This is about young people. It is about investing in the future of Omagh's children and young people, and there is excitement out there at that prospect. I believe that, even in the schools that are currently uncertain about their intentions and have not committed, the young people of those schools, and many of the teachers, are looking forward in great number to that vision becoming a reality. It will be a site where academic and vocational exist side by side, and there will be increasing respect for the vocational in that environment. That is a good thing.

I thank the Minister, John O'Dowd, for the recent visit, which I was part of. Essentially, it was an event at Omagh College. I am sure that he has been since, but my last direct engagement with the Minister on this matter was at that event.

Other Members have asked the relevant questions — when and who. When is it going to progress to the next stage? What is the next stage? Who has signed up? What discussions are taking place to further persuade them of the value of signing up?

My vision for education in that part of west Tyrone is one where the schools will share the site and where there are viable rural schools and post-primary schools, a la Dean Maguirc in Carrickmore and St John's College in Dromore. The Omagh district has a large youth population, and can accommodate all of that. We are specifically talking about the Lisanelly education campus today.

That project, together with the A5; the enhanced local hospital in Omagh; the educational campus itself; hopefully those newbuilds in Dean Maguirc and St Colmcille's Primary School; and health centres in that area — these projects will provide a much-needed shot in the arm for the construction industry. It is an area where hundreds and thousands of young people are emigrating at this time. There are 160 young people in Australia at this time from the Dromore and Trillick community alone. Dromore is a large village or small town and Trillick is a village. They are five miles apart, and between Dromore and Trillick, 160 young people are in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney at this time.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister to provide clarity and certainty as far as he can in relation to next steps, who has signed up and all of that. I thank the Minister for being in attendance, as well as the Chair of the Education Committee, who hails from a different constituency, but his interest is very welcome.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an deis seo díospóireacht ar champas an oideachais roinnte ag Lios an Eallaigh agus an tairbhe do phobal na hÓmaí agus don cheantar máguaird. I welcome this opportunity for a debate on the Lisanelly shared education campus and the benefits that it will deliver to the community in Omagh and the surrounding area.

The Lisanelly shared education campus provides the town of Omagh and neighbouring areas with a unique opportunity to develop a model for shared education — a model that can and will act as a flagship project for the area and as a beacon showing the way forward for other educational communities. It is truly about putting the pupils first and securing a shared educational, social and environmental future for our young people.

The Lisanelly campus project will deliver a joined-up, shared future for the children of the Omagh area. The proposal that is currently under development, which is for a series of shared education centres and core schools that are designed to the latest standards, will ensure that pupils' needs are fully met and that they are educated in a collaborative manner, integrating with other young people from all sections of the community while respecting the individual ethos and values of differing sectors and education models.

The Chair of the Education Committee suggested that my temper was not in the best form this afternoon. I am in good form this evening, and after reading out that vision for Omagh, why would you not be in good form? Why would you not support that? It is about education for all the young people of Omagh, treating them on an equal basis in an integrated way on the one site.

It is time to put the young people of Omagh first, ahead of the needs and wishes of individual educational institutions. Mr Byrne touched on that subject and said that a number of boards of governors and perhaps trustees or individuals had concerns about the Lisanelly site and the way forward. They may well have concerns, but I have never seen a more democratic process than that around Lisanelly.

There has been consultation with everyone, and everyone's views have been asked for. There has been discussion after discussion. Omagh District Council is in favour of the project, and there is cross-party support for it. Why should we allow a number of individuals or individual schools to stand in the way of that vision? I am of the view that we should not.

To answer the Chair of the Education Committee and Mr Buchanan, I am not handcuffed to anyone. I do not do handcuffs, and I am definitely not handcuffed to anyone on this matter. My loyalty lies with the Lisanelly campus. No other sector, individual school or body that is opposed to Lisanelly has my support in any shape or form.

It is time to move forward with the project, because it is the right thing to do. Mr McElduff mentioned the construction and economic benefits. It is estimated that every £1 of capital investment by the Government results in a wider benefit of £2·84 to the economy. For every £1 million that is invested, 28 jobs are created. A project the size of the Lisanelly campus has the potential to generate over £300 million in the local economy and to bring more than 3,000 jobs in construction and associated fields to the Omagh area. That, I am sure, will ensure that many of those young people who might have had to travel to Australia will not have to go there, because they will benefit from investment such as this.

Where do we go next? Let us see where we are. It may be useful to remind ourselves of the timescale for the project, because I can understand local frustrations that these matters are taking longer than was perhaps envisaged. It was first proposed in 2006-07 that Lisanelly was a

viable project. The site did not move into Department of Education ownership until April 2011, which is just under two years ago. Since then, we have been proactively moving forward with the consultation process, and we now have an outline business case with the Department.

The outline business case shows that building the schools on the Lisanelly site is economically the best way in which to move forward. Arvalee Special School is moving onto the site, and we have submitted outline planning permission for the site as well.

What is holding up Lisanelly? There are a number of factors, of which the first is money. A quite significant investment of somewhere between £120 million and £150 million is required to fulfil the project. I am looking at a variety of funding options. We are being imaginative in how we fund it. I believe that a number of organisations and bodies from beyond these shores are willing to play a constructive part in funding the project, and we are engaging with them. Secondly, as I mentioned previously, a number of individuals or individual schools have expressed "concerns" on the matter.

Another concern, which had been a factor in delays, was the area-planning process. A number of Members mentioned that and asked what is happening with it. I intend to make a statement on area planning to the House next Tuesday. In a previous statement to the House about capital constructions and future school builds, I said that Lisanelly was, and remains, the core project for Omagh. Ahead of the statement on area planning, I will confirm again that there is only one show in town in Omagh — the Lisanelly site. Until I complete the Lisanelly site and until I ensure that those schools that wish to move onto the Lisanelly site are completed, I do not envisage moving forward with any other capital project in Omagh.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for the clarity that he is trying to give us this evening. However, there is something that I have not been able to get confirmed fully. In the area plan for the Western Education and Library Board, reference is made to a position paper that is going to be produced by the Catholic sector. Is he aware of that position paper? Has it been produced? What influence will it have on the statement on area planning that he intends to make to the House next week?

Mr O'Dowd: It will have no influence in that sense. I know where I am going with Lisanelly. I understand that the Catholic sector is engaging with the trustees and boards of governors of a number of schools on the basis of whether or not those schools are signing up for Lisanelly. That is a decision that those individual schools will have to make. I think that there is a wider responsibility on those boards of governors in this matter.

No one school can think of its individual needs in respect of this project. This is much bigger than any individual school in Omagh. This is about the future well-being of this generation and future generations in the Omagh area. It has been debated democratically. The democratic institutions responsible — the council, the elected representatives and the Assembly — are behind it. It is a Programme for Government target. I will not allow an individual, or individuals, to hold up this project.

From Tuesday of next week, I will be making announcements on area planning. I am in a position to say that the Lisanelly project will be confirmed as part of area planning. Capital investment in Omagh will be on the Lisanelly site for those schools that choose to go onto it. After we have completed that, those schools that do not wish to go onto the Lisanelly site will be considered for future funding, if funding is available at that time. However, I will not, as Mr Byrne suggested, set up a body of civil servants to discuss the matter further. The matter has been discussed enough.

Mr Hussey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes.

Mr Hussey: I thank you for what you said so far. I am on the board of governors of Omagh High School. We were told some years ago that the Lisanelly campus was the only show in town. In my remarks, I asked whether you would go ahead without the input of Omagh Academy, Loreto and the Christian Brothers. Those schools that have committed to the project are entitled to see their newbuilds as soon as possible, particularly Omagh High School and Sacred Heart College. Are you now saying that you will go ahead with those schools because they have bought in?

Mr O'Dowd: I am saying that, but let us not rule out any school at this stage. What is the best future for the controlled sector in Omagh? Is it simply to build the high school for 700 pupils, or is it to look at proposals — as recently happened in Strabane — for a bilateral school where there is access through academic selection and non-academic selection on the one site? Is that the way forward for it? I ask the controlled sector to have a serious think about the best options for the controlled sector in Omagh.

I firmly believe that any school that moves onto the Lisanelly site will have world-class facilities that will be attractive to pupils and parents. I would be highly surprised if any parent chose not to go onto the Lisanelly site after seeing the facilities that are planned for that site. Let the controlled sector have further discussions about the actual shape of the schools in the controlled sector. I do not want to rule any school in or out at this stage.

However, what I am saying is this: the only capital development that will take place in Omagh over the next number of years will be on the Lisanelly site. I am not looking at building any individual schools in Omagh ahead of Lisanelly. I cannot be any clearer than that. That is crystal clear. I urge any school that has not yet signed up to Lisanelly to seriously consider its position both as members of the Omagh community — schools are part of the community and have a duty not only to their pupils but to the surrounding communities — and as citizens. They should realise that what is happening in Omagh is a key development, not only for Omagh but for across the North. That sends out a major signal that we can make change, that we can share within education and that there are possibilities here for other towns and cities across the North.

Members, I can understand some of the frustrations, and I appreciate Mr McAleer bringing the debate forward. However, I hope I have made it crystal clear, and I know this has been said before, that the only show in town for Omagh is Lisanelly.

Adjourned at 7.30 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 25 February 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Cycling: Martyn Irvine

Mr Speaker: Conall McDevitt has been given leave to make a statement on Martyn Irvine becoming a world champion track cyclist that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should continually rise in their place. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Mr McDevitt: Those who believe that success in track cycling is just a matter of throwing money at a rider and some fancy aerodynamic kit should look no further than Newtownards rider Martyn Irvine's gold and silver medals at last week's world championship cycling event in Minsk. Steven Beacom captured it brilliantly in the 'Belfast Telegraph' when he wrote:

> *"Not bad for a bloke who told me ... last year that he was a couch potato when he was a kid and did all he could to get out of PE at Movilla High School in Newtownards. Martyn didn't take up cycling until he was 18 ... Winning a silver in the Individual Pursuit event at the World Track Championships in Minsk ... was a magnificent effort. We'd have settled for that ... Joyously though there was more to come. Much more. Less than an hour after taking silver, Martyn followed it up by claiming gold in the Scratch race. Remarkable. Put this down as one of the finest sporting feats ever accomplished by an Ulsterman. And it was the staggering way he did it that made his victory even more heroic. Despite being almost out on his feet after his earlier exertions, with 10 out of the 60 laps to go in the Scratch event, he broke from the bunch and basically just went for it sprinting away with every last drop of energy he had. No guts, no glory ... Martyn Irvine – Champion of the world!"*

Those are Mr Beacom's words, not mine. It was an extraordinary achievement: the equivalent in athletics would be a medal in the 400 metres at the Olympic Games followed an hour later by gold in the 3,000 metres. He has done it all on a shoestring. It is what they call paniagua in cycling — bread and water. It means two things: you ride clean, but you ride with very little resource. The budget for track cycling in Ireland is well under €100,000, which is just under £90,000. Compare that with the £8 million a year available to the GB team in this Olympic cycle. It goes mainly to fund Martyn and Caroline Ryan, who won bronze last year in a points race, and they spend much of their time training in Majorca, pooling their track time so that they get the necessary hours in. I want us to do more than just honour him today. I want us to invest in him and to make him as proud of us as we are, undoubtedly, proud of him.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Member for tabling this Matter of the Day regarding a Newtownards man and, indeed, one of my constituents, Martyn Irvine. Over the past few years, the interest in competitive cycling has increased massively, thanks in no small part to some now almost iconic British cyclists, such as Sir Chris Hoy, Sir Bradley Wiggins, Victoria Pendleton and our own Wendy Houvenaghel, who tasted world championship success in the team pursuit in the 2008, 2009 and 2011 track world championships. It is fantastic that another local emulated that success by winning gold in the scratch discipline at last week's world championships in Minsk. Amazingly, as Mr McDevitt said, he won his gold medal in a 15 km race only an hour after winning in a 4 km race in the individual pursuit. This achievement is made all the more remarkable, considering the meagre resources that are available to him. Even Martyn himself commented:

> *"You couldn't live on what I'm living on".*

All of Newtownards, Strangford and, indeed, Northern Ireland should be extremely proud of what Martyn has done through his hard work, his discipline and his endeavour.

Coincidentally, Martyn's success came on the day that it was announced that the Giro d'Italia is coming to Northern Ireland in May 2014, thanks to the work of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board in securing this. It is an event that draws a television audience of 800 million and is broadcast live to 165 countries. I hope that what the likes of Wendy Houvenaghel and Martyn Irvine have achieved can inspire a generation and that, with major events such as the Giro d'Italia being held here, Northern Ireland can be more than just the capital of golf. In conclusion, I wish Martyn well in his future races and, in particular, when he represents Northern Ireland in next year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Déanaim comhghairdeas fosta le Martyn ar an ócáid stairiúil seo. I congratulate Martyn Irvine on the occasion of winning silver and, indeed, the world championship for Ireland.

As other Members have said, it was a very historic day in Minsk for Irish cycling, and this comes on the back of a remarkable number of months for Martyn, including, of course, his participation in the 2012 Olympics and his success in the Track World Cup in November and now

this spectacular double win. It is a fairy-tale story of a boy who went from being a mechanic to a cyclist and has now become a world champion. We give our heartiest congratulations to Martyn. I also take this opportunity to pass our congratulations to Kelly Gallagher for winning the bronze medal in the women's downhill and silver in the Super-G. They have both done us proud, as, indeed, has the Ireland women's rugby team in winning the Triple Crown. At this moment in time, the less said about the men's team the better. I cannot let it go without congratulating Derry on a great start to the National Hurling League at Celtic Park yesterday.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the previous Member who spoke for saving me the bother of having to read the sports pages to find out what happened over the weekend. Like Miss McIlveen, I take a particular pride in the achievement of Martyn Irvine, because he comes from the Strangford constituency and its main town of Newtownards. The Member for South Belfast gave us some context for the scale of the achievement, which is hard to overstate. The last time a man from these shores won a world track event, distances were measured in miles, not in metres. The year was 1896. Members will know that as a famous year, not least for the shortest war in recorded history — the Anglo-Zanzibar war — which, as we all remember, started at 9.00 am and finished 45 minutes later. That was one minute less than it took GB and Northern Ireland to win a hat-trick of golds at last summer's London Olympics. However, that golden 46 minutes was the work of three athletes: Rutherford, Farah and Ennis. Martyn Irvine took less than an hour to win two individual medals: silver in the individual pursuit; and gold in that 15-kilometre scratch. He was only bettered once by the reigning champion in the individual pursuit.

The whole of Newtownards will come together to celebrate that achievement, as will the whole of Strangford, remembering that this is not exceptional for the area. Sycerika McMahon recently won silver at the Euro swimming championships.

I congratulate Martyn Irvine. There will be pride at Movilla High School, his old school, in Newtownards, in Strangford and across Northern Ireland and pride across the whole of Ireland because he won wearing an Irish vest. I look forward to seeing Martyn in Northern Ireland colours next year at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Mr McCarthy: It gives me great pleasure to join my colleagues in congratulating Martyn Irvine from Newtownards on his fantastic achievement. He won the gold and silver medals at the world cycling championship last week. We are absolutely thrilled and delighted. I had the pleasure a couple of years ago, as chairman of Ards Borough Council sports development committee, of awarding Martyn the title of "Sportsperson of the Year". At that time, we in the committee obviously saw the talents that Martyn had and his determination and potential, and his performance last week proved us right in our confidence in that talent and ability.

Martyn certainly proved his excellence on the world stage last week. He brought great credit not only to himself but to his family, his home town of Newtownards, Northern Ireland and, indeed, the whole island. We wholeheartedly congratulate Martyn on his wonderful achievement and performance, and we wish him well for the future.

While I am on my feet, I also congratulate the Irish ladies' rugby team on bringing the Triple Crown home to Ireland. We are a nation of sportspeople, and we can bring the gold home to Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Mr McNarry: My Strangford constituency, which has an exceedingly fine reputation for sports activities, including cycling, greeted the success of Newtownards man Martyn Irvine with a wide-ranging rendition of plaudits, which has been added to here. My own would be "Fantastically brilliant", "World champion indeed" and "Well done, Martyn".

Assembly Business

Extension of Sitting

Mr Speaker: I advise the House that I have been given notice by the members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend today's sitting past 7.00 pm under Standing Order 10(3A). The Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 25 February 2013 be extended to no later than 8.00pm. — [Mrs Overend.]

Committee Membership: Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Robin Swann replace Mr John McCallister on the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. — [Mrs Overend.]

12.15 pm

Executive Committee Business

Criminal Justice Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: Members will recall that, due to the tabling of a petition of concern against amendment Nos 21, 24 and 26, proceedings on the Bill were halted last Tuesday after the Question was put on amendment No 20. The remaining amendments will be moved formally as we go through the Bill, and the Question on each will be put without further debate. The Question on stand part will be taken at the appropriate points of the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Schedule 2 (Articles 63B to 63O of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, as inserted)

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 21 has already been debated and is mutually exclusive with amendment No 22.

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

No 21: In page 15, line 41, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 16 and insert

"and

(c) the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Retention of Biometric Material has consented under Article 63DA to the retention of the material."— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): As indicated last week, I will not move the amendment.

Amendment No 21 not moved.

Amendment No 22 proposed:

In page 16, line 1, leave out paragraph (d) and insert

"(d) the District Judge (Magistrates' Court) has made an order under paragraph (13) for the retention of the material." *— [Mr McCartney.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 32; Noes 56.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Ms McCorley

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy,

Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No 23 proposed: In page 16, line 26, leave out paragraphs (11) and (12). — *[Mr McCartney.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 32; Noes 55.

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Ms McCorley

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 24 has already been debated and is mutually exclusive with amendment No 25.

Amendment No 24 not moved.

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 25 as it is consequential to amendment No 22, which has not been made. I will not call amendment No 26 as it is consequential to amendment No 24, which has not been made.

Amendment No 27 proposed: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons completing diversionary youth conference

63HB.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who has completed the diversionary youth conference process with respect to a recordable offence; and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.

(3) For the purposes of this Article, a person completes the diversionary youth conference process with respect to an offence if (and only if)—

(a) a diversionary youth conference under Part 3A of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 has been completed with respect to that person and that offence, and

(b) the Director of Public Prosecutions, having considered the report of the youth conference co-ordinator, has determined not to institute proceedings against the person in respect of the offence or, as the case may be, not to continue proceedings already instituted against the person in respect of the offence."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 45.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 28 made: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons given a penalty notice

63HC.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who is given a penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and in respect of whom no proceedings are brought for the offence to which the notice relates, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) from the person in connection with the investigation of the offence to which the notice relates.

(2) The material may be retained—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, for a period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken,

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, for a period of 2 years beginning with —

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 29 proposed: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons under 18 given a caution

63HA.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which —

(a) relates to a person who —

(i) is given a caution in respect of a recordable offence which, at the time of the caution, the person admitted; and

(ii) is aged under 18 at the time of the offence, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until —

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with —

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken." — [Mr A Maginness.]

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 46; Noes 44.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Durkan

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment No 30 not moved.

Schedule 2, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 3 (Amendments: fingerprints, DNA profiles, etc.)

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 31, as it is consequential to amendment Nos 18 and 19, which have not been made.

Amendment No 32 made: In page 23, line 12, leave out from "that has come" to the end of line 13 and insert

"which—

(a) has been taken by the police from a person—

(i) under a power conferred by Article 62 or 63; or

(ii) with the consent of that person, in connection with the investigation of an offence by the police;

(b) consists of or includes human cells; and

(c) was taken for the purpose of deriving a DNA profile from it;". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 33 proposed: In page 23, line 29, leave out "which" and insert

"—

(i) which was committed when that person was aged 18 or over, and

(ii) which". — [Mr A Maginness.]

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 47; Noes 45.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr Speaker: I will not call amendment No 34 as it is consequential to amendment No 26, which has not been made.

Schedule 3, as amended, agreed to.

Schedule 4 (Repeals)

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 35 is consequential to amendment No 10.

Amendment No 35 made: In page 24, line 17, at end insert

"PART 1

SEX OFFENDERS

Short Title	*Extent of repeal*
The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42)	*Sections 97 to 101.*
	In section 136(8) "101".

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment Nos 36 and 37 are consequential to amendment No 13.

Amendment No 36 made: In page 24, leave out line 25 and insert:

"In section 4(5), paragraph (b) and the word "or" immediately before it.

Section 5(1).

Section 5(13)."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 37 made: In page 24, line 26, column 2, at beginning insert

"Section 57(2)(a).

Section 58(2)(a).

Section 59(2)(a)."

— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Schedule 4, as amended, agreed to.

Long Title

Amendment No 38 made: Leave out "and to" and insert "; to". *— [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]*

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 39 is consequential to amendment No 14.

Amendment No 39 made: At end insert

"; to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 40 is consequential to amendment No 15.

Amendment No 40 made: At end insert

"; and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Mr Speaker: Amendment No 41 is consequential to amendment No 16.

Amendment No 41 made: At end insert

"and to abolish the common law offence of scandalising the judiciary". — [Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice).]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister for Regional Development to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development).]

Mr Speaker: No amendments have been selected, so there is no opportunity to discuss the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill today. Its Further Consideration Stage is therefore concluded. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Budget Bill: Final Stage

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

That the Budget Bill [NIA 18/11-15] do now pass.

Today's Final Stage of the Budget Bill draws to a close the legislative process for the current financial year. The House has debated the Budget Bill and the Supply resolutions over the past few weeks, and I am sure that Members will be happy to hear that I do not intend to repeat everything that has been said. With the exception of one or two Members' contributions, the debate has by and large revolved around the financial issues relating to 2012-13 and has been useful. One or two, however, may have strayed from the path, and I suppose that that is to be expected. In fact, I may even have strayed along with them or been encouraged to stray along with them on occasions, and indulgence has been given to me to do that. I was particularly entertained by Members who began their speech by giving advance notice that they did not even intend to stay on the topic. It is always nice to know that Members recognise that they are not on the topic but will talk about whatever they have in their notes anyhow. Lest I be accused of the same thing, I will turn to today's business.

Mr Elliott: Never.

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member recognises that I tend not to do that.

The Budget Bill covers the 2012-13 financial year and provides legal authority to spend in the first few months of 2013-14. In the management of public expenditure, we began the year 2012-13 with an overcommitment that we sought to manage through the in-year monitoring process. Throughout the three monitoring rounds, we were able successfully to manage down that overcommitment, as well as reallocate surplus funding to key areas such as employment and health. However, it would be a mistake to say that we are now finished with budgets for 2012-13. There is still a lot to be done in the remaining weeks. Ministers and Committees must make every effort to ensure that departmental budgets are carefully managed, thereby ensuring that we minimise underspend and the risk of having to return funding to the Treasury.

Ministers and Committees should also now turn their attention to 2013-14. We should be in the latter stages of planning for the next financial year, the first few months of which are covered by this Budget legislation. We must seek to ensure that public expenditure is fully utilised by Departments so that we maximise the budgets available. It is also critical that we seek to identify and redistribute additional funding as early as possible in the new financial year. The Vote on Account legislation in the Bill is crucial to that good start to 2013-14.

1.30 pm

I will spend a moment or two reflecting on 2012-13. This year was an important one for our tourism industry. Northern Ireland hosted the Irish Open, which brought much-needed tourism to the north coast and beyond. We also commemorated the centenary year of the Titanic, which also brought in much-needed tourism. In 2012-13, the Executive allocated some 30% of available current expenditure funding to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, again recognising that the health of our citizens underpins our society.

The Executive were able to provide £4 million as a response to the pseudomonas outbreak, £1·3 million to carry out repairs to Arvalee special school after the fire there and £1·5 million for emergency financial assistance for people whose properties were affected by flooding, proving again that the Executive have the power to respond swiftly to significant emerging issues. We were also able to allocate £19·9 million to the Department for Social Development (DSD) for co-ownership and housing initiatives to help to get people on the property ladder and £4 million for thermal improvements to Housing Executive homes, helping people on low incomes to save in energy costs.

I could go on, Mr Speaker, but I hope that these things give a flavour of the different ways in which the Assembly has delivered for our citizens, not to mention the delivery of ongoing routine public services on a day-to-day basis.

I move on to 2013-14. The Assembly will oversee many opportunities and challenges for our citizens. It is up to us to ensure that public services continue to be delivered, which is what this Vote on Account legislation intends to facilitate. Additionally, we must ensure that those public services are delivered in such a way as to maximise their use for the citizens of Northern Ireland. I now look forward to hearing from Members on this important legislation.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím le labhairt anseo inniu ar son an Choiste. I speak on behalf of the Committee.

As Members will be aware, the Budget Bill provides the statutory authority for expenditure in 2012-13 as specified in the spring Supplementary Estimates, which encompasses what happened during the year's monitoring rounds. The Bill also includes the Vote on Account, which allows public expenditure to continue in the early part of the next financial year, until the Main Estimates for 2013-14 are voted on by the Assembly in early June.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel took evidence on the Budget Bill from Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) officials on 30 January. This evidence session marked the final stage of a process of scrutiny by the Committee of the 2012-13 in-year monitoring rounds. In addition to briefings on the Department's own position before and following the outcome of each monitoring round, the Committee also received briefings on the strategic and cross-departmental issues relating to public expenditure.

Under Standing Order 42(2), the Committee must determine that there has been appropriate consultation with it on the Budget Bill before recommending that it is content to grant accelerated passage. In this regard, the Committee welcomes the engagement with the Department during the quarterly monitoring rounds and on the Estimates and the Bill. It was particularly helpful for members to receive clarification on the details of the in-year technical changes to resource and capital allocations of Departments, some of which were quite significant. Clarification was also received on the limited headroom built into the spring Supplementary Estimates for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Department of Justice, and members welcomed the assurance from DFP that the headroom

in both Departments will be monitored to ensure that allocations are used only for the agreed purposes. Given that scrutiny process and the assurances received, the Committee was, therefore, content to grant accelerated passage to the Bill.

As to the residual issues to be addressed in the weeks ahead, the Committee reiterates the importance of Departments minimising year-end underspend to ensure that the Executive keep within the limits of the Budget exchange scheme agreed with the Treasury. In his statement to the Assembly on 22 January 2013, the Minister advised that:

> *"The Executive are carrying forward a considerable overcommitment on the resource DEL side. That should ensure that our block-level underspend at the provisional out-turn stage will not exceed the Budget exchange scheme limit" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 81, p57, col 1].*

Given the financial and economic challenges facing the Executive, it is vital that the moneys are not lost to Northern Ireland and returned to the Treasury through year-end underspend exceeding the limits of 0·6% of resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) and 1·5% of capital DEL — figures which exclude the Department of Justice, which has separate end-of-year flexibility arrangements.

In his statement on 22 January, the Minister advised that the actual amounts of those percentage limits:

> *"will be finalised and agreed with ... Treasury in the coming weeks, but they are likely to be around £50 million of resource DEL and £14 million of capital DEL." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 81, p54, col 2].*

Perhaps the Minister will provide an update on the precise figures later in this debate.

Also on that issue, I reiterate the recommendation that all the statutory Committees closely monitor the forecasting and expenditure of their respective Departments during the remainder of this financial year — and, indeed, over the next financial year — in order to ensure that underspend is minimised and that Departments maximise the impact from available resources. Full and timely engagement by Departments with their respective Committees is crucial in ensuring that all statutory Committees can fulfil their important advisory and scrutiny functions in that area.

A further residual issue that the Finance Committee continues to examine is the question of the £18 million of European Union funding relating to the Titanic signature project. That was discussed by the Committee during its evidence session with DFP officials on the January monitoring round. More recently, during the Second Stage debate on the Bill, on Tuesday 12 February, the Minister assured the House that:

> *"The only time frame is that Europe requires that the money be spent within the next two years. So, the time frame is about finding the projects that are available that can spend the £18 million before 2015, and there are plenty of such projects".*

He went on to explain that:

> *"What we simply do is use European money to fund those projects and take £18 million from them and make it available to DETI." — [Official Report, This Bound Volume, p84, col 2].*

The Committee has received some initial clarification from DFP on the role played and advice provided by the Central Procurement Directorate in the procurement process for the project. The correspondence from the Department also indicated that DFP is working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) on a range of potential projects which may be suitable to attract the £18 million in EU funding. Following consideration of that correspondence at their meeting last week, members agreed to request a private briefing from the applicable departmental officials to examine the issues, including the options for ensuring that Northern Ireland does not lose the £18 million in EU funding.

During the oral evidence from DFP officials on the Bill, the Committee also queried the impact of the Titanic signature project issue on the DETI spring Supplementary Estimates. On that technical point, the departmental officials informed the Committee that the spring Supplementary Estimates for DETI could be subject to change if the First Minister and deputy First Minister approve spending for the Titanic signature project. Any resultant increase in the DETI departmental expenditure limit on its reconciliation page will be updated accordingly as an addendum.

However, it was also explained that, if the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) endorses the allocation of £18 million to DETI, it will not appear in the DETI Estimate, but it will instead score in the Tourist Board accounts as a non-departmental public body. That is because, under current arrangements, Estimates reflect only the cash grant paid by sponsoring Departments to their non-departmental public bodies and not the full resource consumption. On that point, DFP officials explained that the review of the financial process aims to resolve the issue of aligning budgets, Estimates and accounts and thereby increase transparency.

During the evidence session on 30 January, DFP officials indicated that work was ongoing to progress the review, including discussions with counterparts in other Departments to find some way in which ministerial autonomy could be protected, so that Ministers have discretion to move resources around as they want to, but, at the same time, the Assembly is provided with an insight into where the resources are going. Perhaps the Minister can also update the House on that issue later in today's debate.

The two residual issues that I highlighted will, no doubt, be the subject of further consideration at a later date. For today, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister and congratulate him for bringing this forward today. I do not want to redden his face, but he does a wonderful job. Self-praise is no recommendation, but I am giving it to him anyway.

Agreeing the Budget Bill today will allow us to agree this year's 2012-13 spend and the spend for the first part of 2013-14 until we approve everything in June, hopefully.

In the monitoring rounds, Departments brought forward a commitment with regard to redeeming funds at as early a stage as possible so that they are not lost. Up to now for

this year, things are working better. Historically, moneys have had to go back to Westminster because they were not spent. However, that is not the case. I know that the media like to jump all over the block grant that we receive and the moneys that we spend and do not spend. Parameters have been set down about how much we can or cannot carry forward, and it is good budgeting to ensure that that happens.

The Minister talked about ensuring that all work is carried out between now and the end of this financial year. Some Departments will definitely have difficulty in reaching some of those targets, but let us hope and pray that they do.

There was a problem with regard to Departments' interpretation of efficiency plans. Some arm's-length bodies and some Departments have different impressions of efficiencies, and work needs to be done to ensure that everyone is singing from the same hymn sheet. Departments' forecasts and expenditure was an area that we focused on greatly. The Committee wants to ensure that those forecasts are realistic and can be met through the expenditure over the next year and are not crystal-ball gazing. We have had to deal with some Departments having an overcommitment on their resource. So I appreciate that.

We support the motion. I was happy that the Committee agreed to accelerated passage and that we did not have the same debacle as last year, which created some difficulty, but we got there eventually. It had the potential for Departments to spend without that spending being formally agreed through the House. I support Final Stage and look forward to ensuring that, come June, we take the same approach to the Final Stage of the Budget Bill for 2013-14.

1.45 pm

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The discussions that we had in the earlier consideration of the Bill covered all the bases. The systems that we have developed are working quite effectively and are being worked effectively. We had an early focus on more accurate, more rigorous financial projection and set performance targets against that. I think that that has had the desired effect and that we manage the overall Budget in a much more satisfactory way. There will always be exceptions and circumstances that cannot be anticipated, but the flexibility of monitoring rounds allows us to adjust.

I echo Paul's comments about efficiency savings. Some Departments have genuinely found efficiencies, but it has been a patchy performance. The same focus that we previously put on financial projections and performance needs to be addressed to this issue because that will be an ongoing requirement as pressure on the block grant continues. On that basis, and just to join in, I commend the Minister on the motion and on the work done so far.

Mr Cree: It is nice to be able to support the Final Stage of the Budget Bill here this afternoon. As you know, the Bill provides a statutory authority for expenditure in 2012-13. I was talking to Mr Girvan in the Lobby, and I am just wondering whether he was reading my speech or has a very good memory, but he seemed to cover the same points, as, indeed, did Mitchel. It is probably a good thing that everyone in the Committee is singing from the same hymn sheet, and I have to say that it is an unusual occurrence.

Two weeks ago, we approved the spring Supplementary Estimates. They cover the monitoring rounds and the Vote on Account, which permits public expenditure in the early part of the next financial year. The Main Estimates for 2013-14 will be considered and decided by the Assembly in June. We will then enter year 3 of the four-year mandate, and, as I have said before, it is crucial that the Executive ensure that all Departments engage fully with their respective Committees by providing adequate information in time for scrutiny. The review of the financial process was intended to provide clarity in order to make such engagement meaningful. Does the Minister expect the Executive to agree and implement the improvements in time for the Main Estimates later in the year?

The current system is ineffective and does not show transparency or direct read-across. Moreover, Ministers must make every effort to ensure that departmental budgets are adhered to and underspend kept to an absolute minimum. We have to avoid the risk of having to return any unspent funding to the Treasury. The Minister said last year that such an occurrence would be extremely difficult to explain to taxpayers as we work through one of the tightest Budgets in recent years. It remains so. Increasing overcommitment to protect inadequate spending is just not good enough, and I support the Minister in his stand to improve accountability.

Last year, we were advised that some 1,400 new starts in the social housing sector had been provided. It would be good to know the situation today. Taxpayers need to know the actual results being achieved and what progress is being made over and above the provision of routine public services.

Another concern that I have is that Departments may well have failed to make the efficiency savings that they announced. I noticed that the Deputy Chairman referred to that. The Minister is well aware of the Audit Office report, and I would appreciate any comments that he is able to make on the situation and on how it will have a direct effect on the Budget figures.

We need to up our game and illustrate delivery during the remaining two years. The Estimates in June will be a critical time in defining the success or otherwise of this Government. We will be judged on that.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Bill's Final Stage debate. Although it has been said that the Budget was not all that we would have hoped for, economic reality necessitates that we do all that we can to maximise public expenditure, prevent underspend and strive to rebalance and restructure the local economy.

Most of the other Committee members covered all the technicalities of the Budget process, so I will not repeat those and will keep my comments brief. However, I know that the Minister would feel short-changed if I did not mention that the ongoing costs of managing a divided society are unsustainable.

In his opening remarks, the Minister highlighted some of the successes in tourism etc. Maybe I need to take the opportunity as well to tell him at this stage how wonderful he is. In the face of good news stories, however, the recent unrest has shown that, when we scratch the surface,

the divisions are still very evident. There is no doubt that such divisions will continue to hurt us economically and financially by deterring tourism and investment, as well as by limiting our ability to attract and maintain top talent.

So, although I offer my support to the Bill, the question still stands: how much longer can the Assembly afford to continue spending money on managing division rather than finding sustainable solutions to remove it?

Mr McNarry: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Not wishing to be a party pooper, I want to go on record to say that I actually like Sammy Wilson quite well. However, I will speak in opposition to the Budget Bill. It is my intention to present my case and to be afforded, as I would expect, a fair and uninterrupted hearing. That is an entitlement that, I know, you allow each Member to legitimately claim in the House.

The Minister called for Members to adhere closely to the nuances of the Bill, and he presented to us the accelerated passage of the Bill to ensure the continuity of public services into 2013-14. Although the Finance Minister did a good job of presenting the Budget, the Budget that he had to deliver was a complacent Budget that was agreed by a complacent Executive and presented to a complacent Assembly.

In no short measure, however, I exonerate the Minister, who is, after all, someone who has to present the Budget, which the Executive agreed behind closed doors. He has carried out his duty professionally. I considered tabling amendments, but what is the point? This Budget is, and was, a done deal before the Minister presented it to the House. In fact, the House must share my thoughts, because no party tabled any amendments.

The purpose of the Bill is to authorise the use by Departments and certain other bodies of resources totalling over £16 billion. Current and capital receipts of over £2 billion contribute to an overall operating total of just under £19 billion. The Finance Minister, in his usual style of combining a jolly approach on the one hand with schoolteacher scolding on the other, has been the only Minister to present during the Budget debate. His job was to act as the delegated Minister who was tasked with the job of presenting the Budget carve-up that was agreed at the Executive table.

It seems that no other Minister felt it necessary, or was present, to defend their departmental spend, despite the universal criticism of all Departments by their respective Committees. The House alone and not a Committee is tasked with endorsing this Budget Bill, and not one Department that was mentioned escaped criticism, yet only one Minister — quite properly, the Finance Minister — appeared in the Assembly to first, listen and then to explain the Budget on behalf of absentee Ministers. I am not so sure that, to date, he has defended the Ministers' case for them, in which case I suggest that on future Budget occasions all Ministers should be present to defend their Department's policies and make their own compelling arguments for funding. Their separate cases have clearly convinced the Finance Minister yet again, but how revealing it would be for the House to have heard the merits of the arguments that persuaded Mr Wilson to present the Budget Bill for them.

Let me take them in order: the Department of Justice; the Health Department; the Department of Education; the Department for Regional Development; the Department for Social Development; the Agriculture Department; the Department of the Environment; the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; the Department for Employment and Learning; and the Culture Department. All those Departments have high-spending Ministers. Each of those Departments is taking the Assembly on a route map of policies determined by individual party political agendas.

Take the education budget. Is the House agreed to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) empire being funded? In the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), is this Budget a rush towards blank-cheque handouts to Translink? Even though a serious Committee inquiry is taking place, are we content to fund Translink performances? Are we agreeing to a major road spend in the west, still mired in court cases? That spend is locked into this Budget.

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

In health, is the House making itself complicit in playing the almighty distributor of priorities in that, the most sensitive of all complex Departments, where funding has simply become a lottery? In environment, are we funding a budget for a wind farm policy, a retail development policy and a Belfast versus the rest policy, and agreeing to the Budget funding an over-expensive super-council structure? When we look at the Budget presented, we see that you are all agreeing to those policies. You are giving powers of attorney to Ministers to fund their own political agendas. Of course, that has to be one of the joys of operating a mandatory coalition.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: Just a minute.

The Assembly, caught in a mood of complacency, is allowing a party political carve-up at the Executive table, where the shopping list of largely party political fiefdoms is divvied up. We have cantonised government here. We have a Government of self-interested, party political shopping lists, rather than a Government of true coalition, presenting ideas and even solutions. That is, I contend, no way to run Northern Ireland during the greatest economic crisis in 80 years.

Look at the budgetary requirements borne out of party political projects and not out of addressing the needs of our economy and our people. You would almost think that austerity had not arrived in Northern Ireland. You could even be forgiven for thinking that austerity is over, when, in fact, no proper balancing of the books has even started. You would think that vulnerable people do not exist in Northern Ireland. However, the truth is that they do exist and are being ignored by a complacent and disconnected Executive preoccupied with their own party political interests and judged by the public, so far, to be smug with it.

How difficult can it be to spend a block grant? However, our Departments routinely return unspent money. That implies that the Departments do not know how to manage money; that they are full of wish lists and pie-in-the-sky projects. When push came to shove, they ran for cover by reneging on their fantasy bids. Tell me this: where do those projects come from? Who dreams them up? Who is conjuring up those spending follies? Are civil servants driving Ministers into a silo mentality of budgetary idealism and over-optimism?

2.00 pm

Having watched Departments return loads of unspent money, I suppose I can now concede that Sammy Wilson was right in saying that contingencies have proved to be unnecessary in our system. So much money is returned unspent that he has the surpluses to tinker, enabling him to readjust the financial allocation between Departments as the year progresses. So, with that departmental mentality, why would Mr Wilson need a contingency to fall back on? The terrible truth is that there is not joined-up government; there is no plan to get us out of the economic crisis; there is no driving energy or vision for government. The whole operation oozes with complacency and a lack of drive and imagination.

Why, when we make a decision to reduce the number of Departments, is the Department for Employment and Learning still there? Seemingly, it is being budgeted for and, seemingly, it has been politically bought and paid for. How many more squalid, self-interested, back-door compromises have to be made before we get a properly accountable system of government that can be properly measured against performance? The compromise that this Budget represents is characterised only by inaction and complacency. It is a situation that led one Committee Chairman to tell senior departmental officials to their face that their performance in front of the Committee was pathetic. Indeed.

However, in the Second Stage debate, one Member, who usually has something sensible to say on budgets, referred to the missed opportunities of this Budget. He said that it was at the strategic level that we are being challenged and that the time had come to at least begin to discuss that strategic level. He is right.

Take the Department of Education. Are we continuing to back ESA? Even though that body has yet to be fully established, we have thrown money, like confetti, at its building-block creation. It seems that it is primed to become an education empire, ready to receive more funding than the House intends. Certainly gone is the argument that ESA would be a self-sustaining body that would be financed on the basis of it being a slim, more efficient authority, and, thus, we were told, one that would, effectively, deliver savings. Savings through expenditure reductions are, it seems, no longer mentioned in the debate.

Are we budgeting for an ESA monster with a voracious appetite for eating up money? Does that budgeting also allow for the appalling policy decision to ignore, keep out or even permit associate representation on the ESA board for the voluntary grammar schools? In fact, are we supporting a budget to finance ESA, which, in effect, will do all it can to outlaw grammar schools?

A budget should be founded on integrity and not on expediency. These so-called agreed measures for implementation that are reflected in the Budget represent to me one hell of a compromise and a vacuum where principle should have stood. That compromise needs some explaining, because the Budget is the outworking of all the backstairs deals and all the agreed measures of this five-party mandatory coalition. This Budget will set in stone the priorities of that mandatory coalition, and, by supporting them, we are passing on those squalid deals on the nod.

Compiling the mandatory coalition Budget has not relieved the complexities brought to the table in distributing the spending figure that was put into our circle of administration. That is why the Budget enshrines missed opportunities and is oozing complacency in its carve-up.

Previously, the Finance Minister and I have often clashed. Well, perhaps, we have not clashed. Let me say that we have exchanged a difference of views over the meaning of the term “contingency”. When I wanted to emphasise the need for contingencies, he politely declined by saying that, under his watch, contingencies were unnecessary. What do we do, however, when cavalier attitudes prevail in Departments and are, then, calculated into their budgets? At least, could we not expect to see Ministers being disciplined in a preventative way in future, in order to prevent both them and us looking foolish and incompetent? Is that, in itself, not a contingency worth implementing?

Expectations of the Budget exist out there. There is pressure for solutions and some panacea for the economic crisis that we are in. Nevertheless, this Budget and, I suspect, Budgets that are yet to come can never fully meet all that is expected of them. This Budget, however, fails to bring relief to those who are most in need. That is required to be addressed. Unfortunately, this Budget is not designed to do so. It needs to be reconstructed. New urgencies are developing rapidly. We have a duty to consider what scope, if any, exists to meet those new situations. We must exchange our present rigidity for flexibility.

In essence, what scope has this Budget to deal with certain particular problems that are not going away and are likely to be with us for some years ahead? I have to say that there is a persistent reluctance and unwillingness to reshape how we manage public spending to better meet the demands and needs of the economy and society. These budgetary measures are unacceptably remote from today’s people, today’s needs. We need a Budget that can help to offset the real pain and suffering that impacts directly on people. They will see very little in this Budget for them. There is scant recognition of their everyday requirement to adequately fuel growth, jobs and productivity. We must give people dignity along with a deserved quality of life.

Sixty thousand adults are out of work for a year or more. One-hundred thousand children are caught up in poverty. Thousands are rendered inactive and unable to find employment due to poor qualifications and limited skills. Increased numbers of children are leaving primary schools with severe literacy and numeracy deficiencies. More family homes than ever are being repossessed. Those are the real issues about which no one should feel complacent. I challenge any Minister in any Department to show the public how their use of their budget will impact directly on making life better for any person who is out of work; in poverty; lacking in skills and qualifications; unable to spell, read, write or count; or is caught in negative equity but is unable to keep up their mortgage payments.

That is not to mention the growing number of people who are fully engaged in work but are, nevertheless, struggling to raise a family or enjoy plans for their retirement. During these Budget Bill Stages, I have listened to some Members — and I have heard it today — open their speeches with a rant, interspersed with a whinge, and close them with a Budget validation and a whimper of, “I do” or, “I will support the Budget.” That is not good enough.

A recent comment by Lynda Wilson, on behalf of Barnardo's, caught my attention. She said that people are asking for politicians to wrap policies around investment. We should pay attention to that.

I am mindful that the Minister will have the last word in this debate. I am sure that it will be very enjoyable. He may be tired or buoyant or in a combative mood, but he specifically requested that Members adhere closely to the nuances of the Bill. It is those shades of meaning and open interpretation that I have sought to address. I caution against ignoring what is being said. I respectfully suggest that my opinion is shared by many in the House and, more importantly, many outside. There is a growing consensus that there are underlying problems in this set-up. It is not expressed openly in this debate because the Whips have done their job and organised the cheerleading. Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that there are underlying problems in this political set-up.

The Bill should be part of rectifying the recurrent failure to address complacent departmental management. It should, but it is not. Today, I am not interested in a battle of wits and a one-day-wonder debate, or a Budget Bill that is a one-trick pony. The problem of complacency has been identified, so what can be done? I sense that the House would be agreeable to and interested in a debate that concentrates on really delivering for public expectations and meeting public need, perhaps by using a weighted score on departmental performances.

Earlier, I referred to a Member's view that it was at the strategic level that we were being challenged. That Member went on to ask whether we can develop synergies, find more traction, develop new strategies and see more analysis of why investments did not occur or why they were relocated. He concluded with what I consider to be a wry comment: if we are to continue with the same inputs, we will, unfortunately, continue to get the same outputs. His well-made point helps me to rest my case for an opposing view on the Budget.

Mr Wilson: I thank Members who took part in this short Final Stage of the Budget debate. I emphasise that it is the Final Stage. Maybe the Member who spoke previously should have borne in mind that there have been many opportunities to speak in the House over the past couple of weeks for those who take the view that, somehow or other, there are fundamental flaws in this Budget. The Member believes that that view is shared by many in the House. I am sure that, had he made a cogent case, and, much more importantly, put down some amendments, that untapped source of discontent may have been able to find some expression. I will deal with Mr McNarry's speech later, but, at the very outset, I want to say that a process has been gone through.

The framework for a four-year Budget was laid down in the debates. They took place in the Assembly, and everyone had an opportunity to take part in them. Members also took part in Committees. Ministers had the chance to make their bids. They made those at the Executive; some of them made them publicly in the Assembly. Some made them to their Committees or got their Committees to lobby, and there were substantial lobby groups across Northern Ireland. That set the basis for the four-year Budget, which we are now going through year by year. Of course, there have been changes to it, and that is why we are having this debate. People could not spend money on some of the things they had intended to spend it on; therefore, the money was reallocated. Of course, we also reviewed the Budget, looking at the trends in in-year reduced requirements and whether that meant that budgets should be reviewed in some way.

2.15 pm

Let me quickly go through some of the points that were made in the debate. The Deputy Chairman of the Committee accepted that there had been consultation, and I appreciate the work that the Committee did with my officials and the fact that, having done that work, it was happy for the Budget Bill to go through by accelerated passage. Of course, that did not mean that there were not opportunities for people to express views on the Bill in the House. Indeed, they did so in quite a long Budget debate earlier this month.

I think that the Deputy Chair made a very important point about the flexibilities that already exist for Ministers. He talked about the technical changes that were undertaken by Ministers after Committee scrutiny. One of the things that bemuses me a little is that there was opposition to the financial process arrangements, which would have introduced some changes. Some Ministers objected on the basis that they did not give them enough flexibility. The Deputy Chairman of the Committee got it right: there needs to be flexibility. Indeed, there is substantial flexibility, whether in the de minimis changes that Ministers can make or the retrospectively ratified larger changes that they can make through proactive management and moving money around. In-year bids also give flexibility.

At the same time — this is the other side, and I thought that the Deputy Chairman explained the balance really well — we must make sure that money is spent on the purposes for which it was voted. Therefore, you cannot and should not give carte blanche to Ministers so that, once they get a pot of money, they can simply say, "Let us do whatever we want with it". It is about making sure that you do not tie people's hands and say that every penny must be spent in the way that it was voted — things change, as Mr Bradley pointed out — while, on the other hand, ensuring that the views of the Assembly are not overridden by Ministers who simply say that they have carte blanche and can do whatever they want.

Mr Bradley also raised the issue of the overcommitment, and I can confirm to him that his figures are correct. Obviously, the final figure depends on whatever allocations are made during the year because it is a percentage of our total Budget, but the figures that he gave are, by and large, the correct ones.

Mr Girvan has gone, but I thank him for the fulsome praise that he gave me. It is just a pity that the First Minister was not around to hear it. Anyway, that does not matter. Mr Girvan, Mr McLaughlin and Mr Cree talked about the importance of efficiency plans that Departments had to see through — it was a central theme. I would just make one point on that. Efficiency plans are important, and we set the efficiency levels that Departments have to achieve every year, but it is not for me or my Department to micromanage Departments and tell them that efficiencies have to be achieved by their doing this, this and this. That is up to individual Ministers.

It is then up to Committees to scrutinise that the efficiencies delivered were not at the expense of front line services or, at least, that front line services have not had their provision cut without efficiencies first being delivered in those parts of the Department that do not affect or impact on the public. That is why the monitoring of efficiency plans by Committees is important. It is a pity, and I have made this point time and again, that the Education Minister is the only Minister who is not prepared to engage in that exchange with Committees.

Judith Cochrane raised the issue of tourism and the impact on it of the current flags dispute, which her party unfortunately generated.

Mr McCarthy: No way.

Mr Wilson: Well —

Mr McCarthy: No way, Sammy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: — there is no point in the Member saying, from a sedentary position, "No way; do not blame us.". As far as I and the public are aware, and the record shows it, the vote and the decision on the removal of the flag of our country from Belfast City Hall depended on the votes that the Alliance Party gave in support of Sinn Féin and the SDLP. Of course, that kicked off a whole raft of disorder across Northern Ireland.

Let me make quite clear something that I have said time and time again so am quite happy to repeat: I do not support what has happened as a result of it. I cannot understand why people who value their British heritage and the country in which they live would want to destroy it in that way. Equally, however, I think that those who sparked the reaction cannot run away from the responsibility that they bear for this and then condemn the impact that it is likely to have on our economy.

I really do not know where to start with Mr McNarry's contribution, other than to say that, if he really felt as genuinely and as hard as he said that he does about this Budget, he might have wanted to say all that at a stage when he could do something about it. I suspect that he raised all his objections at this stage because he knew that he could do so secure in the knowledge that nothing could be required of him, other than to engage in a bit of rhetoric. That is basically what it was.

I noticed that he asked what we should then do. I thought, right; I am going to get some really good ideas that I can take to the Executive, and when we review under monitoring rounds the amount of money, or when we start to work on the next Budget, Mr McNarry will have supplied me with great ammunition to take to my Executive colleagues. So, what did we get? He said that we need synergies, traction and strategies — I do not know what all that means. He talked about the unemployed, the poor, the disadvantaged, the need to stimulate the economy and to change direction. Since he mentioned specific problems, I thought that we might have got some specific actions to match them rather than simply a lot of management jargon about synergies, tractions, strategies and Lord knows what else.

However, let us just look at some of the stuff that he said. I am actually glad that somebody said something or at least made some comments about this Budget that I could get my teeth into. He talked about the complacency in the Assembly. We "ooze" complacency. That means all of us — all the parties. Some party Members had been whipped like curs into submission, and others simply could not be bothered anyway. That is except for McNarry, who happened to miss making any contribution in the main Budget debate and who forgot to table any amendments during Consideration Stage or Further Consideration Stage but got himself out of his complacency and rose from his place for the Final Stage debate on the Budget, even though he could not do anything about it by then. Nevertheless, the whole Assembly is, apparently, "oozing" complacency. I would have thought that, had he wanted to be proactive, he would have brought some things through.

Secondly, he asked why all the Ministers were not present to give their case. I cannot understand that. Does he not know how we go about doing Budgets? There is not a country in the world where all the Ministers come and make their case when a final Budget is being presented. It is a bit late at that stage. You can imagine, in that case, George Osborne standing up in a couple of weeks' time in the House of Commons with the Budget for next year and Ministers coming in and saying, "By the way, I want this for DEFRA" and "I want this for BIS.". What way would that be to conduct a Budget debate? We use a very reasonable mechanism, where all the bids from different Departments are weighed up and balanced, and then decisions are made about the pot of resources that we have and the way in which that money should be allocated. Then, of course, once we have decided on those allocations, the Assembly will have the final say on the Budget. Ministers are not present not because they are hiding but simply because it would not be a sensible way of dealing with the construction of a Budget.

He then talked about unspent money and fantasy bids. He asked where those projects come from. Again, he knows enough about monitoring rounds. Let us look at some of the moneys that were returned. The Department of Education returned some money because it took money for schools that had saved money and that may have wanted to use it during the year. Those schools decided that they did not want to use the money and therefore gave it back. I could perhaps criticise the Minister and ask why he did not find that out sooner from the schools, but the truth of the matter is that if the schools decided not to spend their own money, you cannot force them to do so. If they have put that into savings from previous years' budgets and decided that it will be better used next year because next year they are going to paint the school, redo the computer suite, or whatever, that is up to those schools to decide. I could go through lots of other things. Those are not fantasy bids that were picked out of mid-air and never followed through on.

He then asked what we do and said that we tinkered with the surpluses. When Stephen Farry makes bids, and we put £13 million into training young people who have no skills or people who we know already have skills but need retraining, that is not tinkering with the Budget. Indeed, using the Member's own criteria, that is good use of the Budget. When I give money to Nelson McCausland for people to get their foot on the first rung of the property ladder, through co-ownership or whatever, that is not tinkering. That is addressing a real problem that we have. That is what the Budget Bill contains. It reflects the changes that we have made.

If you look at the way in which we have allocated money in the Budget, you will see the priority given to growing the economy. He talks about the 60,000 people who are unemployed, and, yes, there are more people unemployed in Northern Ireland than we want to see. However, our average unemployment rate is now the same as the average unemployment rate for the United Kingdom as a whole. It is well below what it is in the Irish Republic, in most other European countries and in six other regions of the United Kingdom. Even though we are on the periphery of the United Kingdom and tend to suffer greater economic disadvantage, through some of the policies that we have used, we have kept unemployment lower than it would normally be at this stage of the cycle in a recession.

We have also addressed the issue of people living in poverty. Whether through the rates changes that we have made or through some of the things that we are doing through the social investment fund, the social protection fund, etc, we have addressed those particular issues. Of course, we have had to do it from within a Budget that is available to us from the United Kingdom Government. Therefore, I reject the superficial criticisms made at this late stage by Mr McNarry, and I commend the Bill to the Assembly, because I do not want to speak again after Question Time on this particular issue. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, as this is the Budget Bill, cross-community support is required.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Budget Bill [NIA 18/11-15] do now pass.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Creative Industries Innovation Fund

1. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many projects have been supported through the creative industries innovation fund. *(AQO 3456/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. With his indulgence, I want to begin by congratulating Seamus McGarvey, the Armagh cinematographer who was nominated again for an Oscar — unfortunately, he did not get it — for the film 'Anna Karenina'.

The creative industries innovation fund (CIF) originally ran between 2008 and 2011 and supported 156 projects. The fund was relaunched in July 2011 and has a Programme for Government target of supporting 200 projects by 2015. At this midway point, 98 projects have been supported so far. The most recent call for projects closed earlier this month, and the applications that were received are now being assessed.

The fund stimulates the development of commercially viable products and services that are capable of competing in global markets and makes an important contribution to growing our creative industries. I am confident that the Programme for Government target will be achieved.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. I welcome the great detail that the Minister has outlined. Will she assure us that the Programme for Government targets that she referred to will be met across the board, that there will be no regional disparity and that all areas will have the opportunity to excel in what we know is an excellent industry — the creative industries?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The two main areas that have benefited most from the fund have been Belfast and Derry. As a representative of Derry, the Member will know that it is good that the fund and the potential around it will certainly target areas that have experienced high multiple deprivation. However, there are regional disparities, and, again, that is down to local government coming forward with options to have creative industries innovation funding in their area. I am sure that others will ask at another date. I am keen for officials, wherever possible, to encourage local government representatives to make sure that their area has the same opportunities as many others.

Miss M McIlveen: Obviously, I welcome the CIF funding and the good work that it is producing. Does the Minister have any plans to expand the scope of the fund?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do have plans. Were more funds to be made available, I would certainly expand the funding. I am waiting, in particular, for the Committee's report on the creative industries. I anticipate that there will be good, positive suggestions in that report that may not be included in the current complexion of the fund, but I would certainly like to adopt them into the framework.

It is better to have a joined-up approach. There is no point in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure having an approach and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment having an approach and then the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure making good recommendations that neither of those Departments takes account of. I look forward to that report. If there is a need to bid for additional moneys on that basis, I will certainly do so.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her answers, and, of course, I welcome any funding. Does she realise, however, that it is the creative industries that will be the future of our design and the creation of architects and others that will bring jobs? I wonder what other priorities have gone ahead of those, because this is the very source of jobs in the future.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not put any priorities ahead of the creative industries fund in terms of what the funding was intended for. This is a good news story: not only has the fund met its targets midway through, but it looks as if it will probably exceed its 2015 Programme for Government target.

The Member is right: it represents something like 4·1% of the workforce, and well over 30,000 people work in creative industries. The school curricula and those of further and higher education encourage more diversity in the creative industries. You only have to look at, for example, the 'Game of Thrones' set, where people who were involved in traditional employment such as carpentry and electrical engineering are now involved in set design. There is certainly a lot of potential there, and that is something that I am very mindful of.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I should have advised Members that questions 3 and 11 have been withdrawn. As Mickey Brady is not in his place to ask question 2, I call Joe Byrne.

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

4. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will announce the venue for the opening ceremony of the World Police and Fire Games 2013. *(AQO 3459/11-15)*

5. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on possible venues for the opening and closing ceremonies of the World Police and Fire Games 2013. *(AQO 3460/11-15)*

13. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the venue for the opening ceremony of the World Police and Fire Games 2013. *(AQO 3468/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will take questions 4, 5 and 13 together.

Fifteen venues were scored against a comprehensive set of criteria to identify the most suitable venue to host the opening ceremony. This process identified a preferred option and contingency options for consideration by the World Police and Fire Games board. The board considered the options at its meeting on 20 February. The venue selected for the opening ceremony is the King's Hall in Belfast. It is an excellent venue that has extensive experience of hosting major events. It will be a great site for the opening showcase of the games. The closing ceremony venue is planned to be the Titanic Slipways. Both the venue sites have been agreed with the World Police and Fire Games Federation.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is good that the venue has now been settled. Have all the venues that will stage games during the World Police and Fire Games been sorted out?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, all the venues have been settled. There are 41 sports and 57 venues. Not all of those are in Belfast; something like 15 are outside. Everything that was in place remains. The hiccup was with the opening ceremony, but everything else is sorted out.

Ms Brown: I also welcome the selection of the King's Hall complex especially given its historical significance in Belfast. How will the venue be modified to accommodate the opening ceremony? What is the anticipated capacity?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The federation visited several times between April and July. On its last visit, it was stated that the capacity would be 21,000-plus. The King's Hall can reach that number and more and can even retract to receive smaller numbers if appropriate, although that is not envisaged at this stage. The figures anticipated last week are still expected to come here from 1 to 10 August. The King's Hall is more than able to cope with the opening ceremony.

Mr Humphrey: You said that there were 41 sports and 57 venues. What are the anticipated numbers of athletes and people coming to watch the World Police and Fire Games in Belfast?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no figures for how many spectators there will be. There are 10,000 athletes, and it is expected that 15,000 people will accompany them. So, that is up to 25,000. There will be a big local interest, particularly in some of the events. The World Police and Fire Games company is looking at ticketing regimes to make sure that members of the public, particularly schools, have every opportunity to attend the events. Some schools here will be paired with countries that are visiting and competing. I have no figure — not even an indication — for the demand yet, but I expect to have that closer to the time.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister agree that this will be an excellent opportunity to showcase Northern Ireland at its best? There will be so many people coming from all parts of the world. It will be an opportunity to let people see that we have a shared heritage and are promoting a shared and better future for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member. It is not just that. Some of the World Police and Fire Games delegates from five different countries, who were here four or five weeks ago, visited some of our historic sites, tourist attractions and communities. They were nothing but impressed with what we have to offer. That was just a glimpse of what is to come from the start of August.

Tourism: County Londonderry

6. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, following the recent commemoration of the 400th anniversary of The Honourable The Irish

Society at the Guildhall, London, what plans she has to promote cultural tourism throughout County Londonderry. *(AQO 3461/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure plays a central role in cultural tourism in the North through investment in cultural infrastructure such as museums, theatres, sports venues and the City of Culture. In July, a major classical music production will be hosted in Derry to mark the 400th anniversary of the building of the city's walls. The production is a collaboration between the Culture Company and The Honourable The Irish Society. It will be performed simultaneously in the London Guildhall and Derry's Guildhall by the London Symphony Orchestra and Camerata Ireland.

My Department's arm's-length bodies also contribute to promoting cultural tourism through the provision of facilities, ongoing support for cultural services and building partnerships and funding projects to attract visitors, such as the genealogy events and exhibitions that are planned.

Mr Campbell: The Minister outlined a number of events. She will, I am sure, be aware of the success of the event mentioned in the original question at the Guildhall in London last month. Does she agree that the key now is to ensure that all the events that she mentioned and others throughout the city and county of Londonderry need to be effectively marketed to ensure that they are a success?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I totally agree. It is rare for me to totally agree with Gregory Campbell, but I do. They need to be effectively marketed, and they need to be promoted in the community to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to avail themselves of what will be an outstanding opportunity.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for her answers. Will she outline some of the other celebrations that will take place as part of Derry's year of culture? Will she also give us some indication of whether there should be an effective marketing plan and finance from the Tourist Board?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The programme has well over 140 events. In relation to celebrating the building of Derry's walls, there are a few other events around history that we could consider alongside new and existing events that are shaped around the story of the walls. The city will play host to a number of events, such as Graffiti Jam, formerly the Walled City Carnival. The Maiden City Festival takes place in and around the walls as part of the build-up to the Apprentice Boys of Derry Association event. The Verbal Arts Centre will deliver classical musical events about the commissioning of the walls. It is incumbent upon everyone, particularly those with responsibility for promoting tourism, to promote the events in Derry to best effect. Whatever happens in the city of Derry and around the north-west needs to be impacted on by everybody.

Mr Eastwood: In Derry, we have proved that culture can be a good economic driver through cultural tourism. Is much work being done between her Department and DETI to ensure that that good work is capitalised on across the North?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I assure the Member that there is and will continue to be good work. I will make sure that what happens in Derry, particularly this year but also with the legacy, benefits the city. As I have said before and will say time and time again, it is a city that has not seen the investment that it was entitled to for decades. Investment in the City of Culture project by the Executive of over £30 million is a commitment to making sure that the project is very successful not just in 2013 but in the years after that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Michael McGimpsey is not in his place to ask question 7.

World Police and Fire Games

8. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the number of competitors who have registered for the World Police and Fire Games 2013. *(AQO 3463/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: As of 21 February, 2,454 competitors had registered for the games. I continue to closely monitor progress on registrations and anticipate the company achieving the target of 10,000 competitors for the games.

Mr Hilditch: I welcome that information. I am not sure how the Minister views that information. Will the cap of 7,500, as anticipated by the Department, be required?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sorry, I did not pick up the last part of the question.

Mr Hilditch: I was asking about the cap of 7,500 that was put in place.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Everything is in place as it should be. I was concerned some weeks ago that the figure seemed a bit low, but there is constant reassurance from the federation that the figures reflect a typical pattern of behaviour and that, closer to the games, there will be a surge of registrations. The figure includes team registrations, which makes it a bit deceiving. Captains are putting in a registration for their whole team. I want to get that broken down further and have a more accurate figure as the weeks roll on. However, certainly, I am happy at this stage that things are as they should be.

2.45 pm

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister tell us what the current situation is with pop-up accommodation?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pop-up accommodation is still being closely monitored and scrutinised in the event that it is needed by the World Police and Fire Games company. As I have seen, the company is working very closely with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau and the Tourist Board to look at alternative forms of accommodation. As the Member is aware, under the Tourism Order 1992, tourist accommodation must be certified by the Tourist Board, and DETI has provided advice to the Tourist Board on how alternative accommodation, such as pop-up accommodation, will be facilitated under that order. Certainly, it will have all the facilities that anybody would expect in any other hotel or B&B facility.

Mr Gardiner: Can the Minister give us a guarantee that there will be sufficient accommodation for all competitors and that no one will be turned away because there is nowhere for them to stay?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can guarantee that a robust exercise is taking place, looking not just within Belfast and not just at hotel accommodation. As my answer to the previous question suggested, the exercise is looking at pop-up or alternative accommodation. We are also looking at B&Bs and guest houses. Some weeks ago, I met some providers and potential providers. I am content that everything that should be done is being done. That is not just for Belfast and the central area but for outlying areas that are no more than half an hour's journey away. Certainly, there will be benefits for surrounding areas such as Lisburn from the World Police and Fire Games. At this stage, I am happy enough that everything will be done to achieve the target.

Arts: Lottery Funding

Mr McCarthy: Ceist uimhir a naoi, Mr Deputy Speaker. Question 9.

9. **Mr McCarthy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the use of lottery money in supplementing her budget for the arts. *(AQO 3464/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maith thú, a Kieran. I thank the Member for his question.

The Arts Council supports a number of programmes through lottery funding. These programmes include the small grants programme, the intercultural arts programme, the arts and older people programme, capital funding, support for the individual artist programme and specific arts project funding, as well as the annual funding programme. I am very pleased with this additional money from the lottery and how it is utilised because these programmes support groups and individuals in accessing and participating in the arts across the North. As the Minister, I place great importance on this work, as it is of particular importance to those who face barriers in accessing and participating in the arts — for example, older people and minority ethnic communities, as well as marginalised and deprived communities.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, Minister. Does the Minister agree that lottery funding should not be used specifically for her Department but should be used only for additional items and not included in departmental calculations?

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is not. I give the Member that assurance. It is additional money. Lottery money cannot be used to bridge gaps or holes in departmental funding. That is not its purpose. If the Member has any evidence that that is happening, I would be really keen to see it. Lottery money, like European money, needs to be additional and should not be "instead of". Any additional funding, be it from the lotteries, small trusts or elsewhere, that helps people to access the arts has to be welcomed, as I am sure that the Member agrees.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. What impact did the reduction in lottery funding as a result of the 2012 London Olympics have on the arts across the North?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The Arts Council has estimated that there was a loss of £4·2 million as a result of the diversion of funds to the London Olympics, and, naturally, it feels that that reduced the overall funding available to lottery-assisted programmes. Specific details on the impact of that reduction are not available despite numerous requests. My Department has no evidence to suggest that there has been a significant detrimental impact on the access to and availability of funding for the arts here.

Mr Elliott: Given that, as I understand it, the Olympic organising committee handed money back to the National Lottery, has the Minister or her Department made any attempt to see whether any of that money is available to her Department?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware of whether that is the case. I will certainly try to find out. That is the first that I have heard that. Since we saw the figure that was available as a result of the London Olympic and Paralympic Games and heard the lobbying and requests from groups here and further afield about the potential impact of the events in London on the arts, we have constantly raised that matter and will continue to raise it. If there is new or additional evidence that money was handed back to the lottery but has not come back into the communities, I will be keen to hear about that and will certainly be happy to raise the issue.

East Belfast Arts Festival

10. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any representations that her Department has received regarding the East Belfast Arts Festival. *(AQO 3465/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: In 2012, applications for funding for the East Belfast Arts Festival were made to the Arts Council and to Belfast City Council. The application to Belfast City Council was for funding under the community festivals fund, which is match-funded by my Department. Both applications were unsuccessful. Officials from the Arts Council subsequently met the festival organisers to fully explain the reasons for that decision. They also explained the application process to the organisers to assist them with future applications. The Arts Council provided £5,000 for the 2012 East Belfast Arts Festival in the form of sponsorship. To date, my Department has received no representations in relation to an East Belfast Arts Festival for 2013. I have asked my officials to arrange a meeting with you to discuss any assistance that can be made available to the organisers for the festival.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her answer, and I am pleased that she recognises that the east Belfast festival, delivered as it was on a shoestring budget, was a great success. There is an indication from those who organised it that they need a development fund to help to make the festival an even greater success this year than it was last year.

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said in my main answer, I am happy for my officials to meet you, as we have done previously. Given the size of east Belfast and, indeed, the festival's reputation, it merits a visit from officials to see what way we can take it forward, if at all.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her replies so far. I may have missed this, and, if I have, I apologise to the Minister. Did the Department give any direct support to the festival? If not, could the Minister explain why, please?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his supplementary. As I said in the main answer, it is about the Department providing money through the Arts Council and Belfast

City Council through the community festivals fund. Where there are specific requests — maybe the Member for East Belfast is hinting at this — for assistance and support for an overall development plan, which is probably about regeneration, part of which includes arts, we will be happy to look at that and try to support it, where possible. The money for festival programmes is allocated to the Arts Council and to Belfast City Council or local government.

Mr Nesbitt: The Minister said that, as yet, there had been no application for 2013. Would she welcome such an application, and would that be based on her assessment of the success of 2012?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member was present when I gave my answer to Robin Newton, who has raised the needs of east Belfast with me continually. I welcome the fact that, as I have heard anecdotally, 2012 and previous years were a success. I am sure that 2013 will be a success as well. If I hear the Member correctly — I do — I have to say that the shoestring budget was a hindrance and, if further funds or support were made available, the festival could be even more successful.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

World Police and Fire Games: West Tyrone

12. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether West Tyrone will benefit from the World Police and Fire Games 2013. *(AQO 3467/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: The games will bring approximately 25,000 visitors to the North, and it is vital that we use the opportunity to promote and to sell us as a tourist destination. Although there are no games venues in the West Tyrone constituency, Cookstown in Mid Ulster will be the venue for the half-marathon road race. The company has engaged and will continue to engage with all local councils, including those in West Tyrone, to identify opportunities for them to organise or host events related to the games. Those engagements have highlighted opportunities for volunteering, accommodation and local businesses. In addition, a number of informal days have been held for accommodation providers, including local briefings that were held in Omagh and Enniskillen to which persons from County Tyrone were invited.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for her response. Can she give us some more detail on what work has been done with the local council in Omagh, the business community and hoteliers, guest house owners and so forth, so that the effects of the games in Belfast will have a more extended effect — far beyond Belfast — as is only right and proper?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The World Police and Fire Games company and, indeed, my officials have met many representatives from local government. Omagh District Council, for example, did not feel that there was an opportunity for it to bid to host events. Cookstown District Council, for example, put in a bid for the half-marathon road race, and the Member may be aware that 15 of the events and activities that are part of the World Police and Fire Games are being held outside Belfast. Along with Minister Foster, I have met the hoteliers and businesses recently about accommodation. Indeed, we previously met businesses to discuss the potential for the World Police and Fire Games and the City of Culture to increase support for, in particular, local and small businesses. That work will not stop. If there is anything in particular that the Member wishes to bring to my attention about Omagh or West Tyrone, I am happy to hear it.

Mr McDevitt: I declare an interest as someone who has applied to be a volunteer at the games. Can the Minister tell me whether the rumour is true that I will have an awful lot of competition in securing my opportunity to give up some of my time for free?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am afraid that you are, Conall, and I do not think that we are done yet. There was a request for around 3,500 people to give up their time to volunteer. We now have over 6,000 applicants, and that is good. One of the reasons that we extended the deadline for people to volunteer was to attract people from neighbourhood renewal areas, where, on occasions, there have been difficulties, particularly with some of the services. They have applied, and that is from where the bulk has come. It is good news. I hope that the Member is successful in his application, and I look forward to seeing him taking part in some way.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the question is about the benefits for West Tyrone.

Mrs Overend: It has just occurred to me that there are benefits to other constituents, not just from accommodation. Has that occurred to the Minister? Can she outline some of the benefits to some of our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in West Tyrone and Mid Ulster, maybe in catering and other such things?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am sure that small businesses and SMEs will compete for contracts, and those contracts have been outlined in detail to most of the SMEs. Strong social clauses will be included, so there will be an element of legacy well after the World Police and Fire Games finish. As the Member will know, the games will be hosted in Belfast. Belfast City Council bid for the games and won. We are trying to ensure that the benefits from the games go beyond Belfast and help tourism, SMEs, accommodation, catering, entertainment in local pubs and clubs and even the creative industries. We are looking to see what opportunities there are and what we can develop for August. Everything that can be done is being done.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 13 has already been answered.

Libraries

14. **Mr McNarry** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her vision for the future development of the library service as a community resource across Northern Ireland. *(AQO 3469/11-15)*

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's vision for the public library service is set out in the 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' policy document, which requires:

> *"A flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential."*

That means a library service that reaches out, forms partnerships and finds new ways of becoming relevant to the communities. When libraries do that, they place themselves at the heart of communities. I am sure that the Member will agree that that is the best place for our libraries to be.

3.00 pm

Environment

Local Government Reform: Finance

1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he submitted a bid for £39·5 million to the Department of Finance and Personnel to help finance the reform of local government. *(AQO 3471/11-15)*

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. I can confirm that I made an argument to the Executive over a number of monitoring rounds in the past year, that it should move away from its previous position: that the Executive should not contribute to the cost of local government reorganisation. Although my three former arguments did not prevail, I am pleased to say that the Executive signed off on a proposal to fund local government reorganisation — not as much as I would have liked, but nonetheless substantially, and I want to acknowledge that contribution.

Yes, the original bid of a contribution to up-front costs was in and around £40 million.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for the frankness of his answer. Will he give us an update on any financial assessment that he may have commissioned with regard to the cost of rates convergence within the proposed reorganisation?

Mr Attwood: I am pleased to say that, following a series of robust negotiations, the funding package that was agreed by the Executive included a contribution of up to £30 million for the issue of rates convergence to which the Member refers. That modelling is being taken forward by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), working with the Department of the Environment (DOE), and we anticipate that that is the scale of moneys that might be required on the far side of 2015, in order to ensure that there is not a burden placed upon the ratepayers, both domestic and business, for rates convergence issues that will arise post 2015. Based upon the figures to date, a sum of up to £30 million will certainly help significantly to manage the issue of rates convergence following local government reorganisation.

Ms Lo: Obviously, it is welcome news that there will be central government funding given to RPA. However, we heard all that in the media last week, and I understand that all councillors received a letter giving them information about this agreement that the Minister had reached with the Executive. Is it not very remiss of the Minister not to have come to the House or the Committee to give us details about that agreement? We all heard about it in press articles.

Mr Attwood: I must say that there was a lot of speculation about what was or was not agreed at the Executive meeting over two weeks ago. I understand that, on the Floor of this Chamber, one Minister referred to the agreement, in advance of urgent procedure being deployed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in order to sign off on the funding package that was agreed in principle at the Executive over two weeks ago. Consequently, I think it was my responsibility as a Minister to let the people on the front line know, the councillors of Northern Ireland who were hearing from others — not from me — about the scale of the funding package. Consequently, it was my obligation as a Minister and my responsibility as a public servant to let councillors know the truth of the matter, whatever the speculation.

Mr Weir: I, too, express some disappointment that we did not hear about it formally in this House. Although there has been welcome progress on the financial package for RPA, in the light of that, can he confirm whether there has been any slippage in the RPA timetable, or are we on track?

Mr Attwood: As I have indicated, time after time after time, to the House, the Committee, the Executive and the council clusters, and at every conference that I have spoken at — and there have been many — in my view, the point of no return in respect of local government reorganisation passed a long time ago.

Although I have reservations about elements of local government reform, I have no reservations about the principle. From DOE's point of view, there has been no uncertainty or doubt in respect of doing this, doing it on time and doing it properly. Those are the three standards against which I will be judged. Even though my officials were in contact with council clusters over recent times to ask them to confirm their progress against 11 key performance indicators, two of the councils have yet to reply. It would be quite surprising for the Member to hear which two those are.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister give us a sense of the amount of work required for the transition planning, what capacity is required and how that is being progressed?

Mr Attwood: First, in some degree, I have a little residual sympathy with the councils that, heretofore, have seen local government reform not being progressed. Consequently, they may have thought, heretofore, that there might be some uncertainty about whether it would happen in this mandate.

Secondly, I have sympathy for the councils with regard to the scale of what is being undertaken. In my view, the work involved in merging the councils into 11 with regard to the transfer of functions and councils becoming the planning authority on the far side of RPA is not fully appreciated generally. We have indicated 56 performance indicators to the councils in order to ensure that, whatever hesitancy may or may not reside in one or two councils — a lot of councils applied themselves diligently to the work over the past 18 months — those performance indicators will drive their performance and ensure that they get this done on time and get it done right. It is a very complex undertaking, as it involves hundreds of councillors, thousands of staff and 26 councils. However, now that there is greater certainty around funding and there will be more and more certainly in the near future around other matters, I hope that the councils, together with the DOE, will continue to apply themselves diligently to the task.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 3 and 12 have been withdrawn.

University of Ulster: York Street Campus

2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of the Environment when the Planning Service will make its decision on the University of Ulster new campus at York Street, Belfast. *(AQO 3472/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. It is anticipated that a recommendation on the major York Street University of Ulster proposals will go to Belfast City Council in time for its town planning meeting on 7 March. I have always supported, in principle, the university's proposal to relocate at York Street. When I was a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning a number of years ago, I was one of the MLAs who said that, in principle, it was a wise course of action to locate a university in a city and for it to be part of the regeneration and reconfiguration of the north side of the city of Belfast. It is not an easy planning application to manage, bearing in mind its scale, its massing, traffic and parking, and heritage, nor is it easy to create a scheme that is sympathetic to and reflects the needs of local people, in particular the residents of Carrick Hill.

Mr Humphrey: I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council, although I am not a member of the planning committee. Does the Minister agree that this broad development at York Street from the University of Ulster is hugely important to the north-west part of the city and a huge key development in the broad development of that part of the city and, therefore, there should be no undue delay on any planning announcement?

Mr Attwood: If you look at significant planning applications over the past 18 months, although there has, historically, been undue delay, there is no longer, by and large, undue delay. Look at the decision taken last week in respect of Windsor Park, a planning application that was turned round in 11 weeks, and so on and so forth with regard to other applications being fulfilled within the timelines required, such as Narrow Water bridge, Ravenhill, and so on. Therefore, there is no issue about undue delay in the direction of travel of the planning system.

However, the design of the proposal is of such scale that it will mass significantly on York Street. It will go up very high, and it will have an impact on heritage, parking, traffic, and so on. Therefore, the nature, character and scale of the proposal are very challenging. I hope that nobody in this House or elsewhere thinks that that is an easy call. It is a big call because it is a big proposal, which will have a big impact on that part of the city. If it is done right, it can be part of the overall development in the north side of the city, with the Royal Exchange, north side, the underpass at the Westlink and the Harbour Commissioners proposal at City Quays all gathering around the Cathedral Quarter. We have an unprecedented opportunity to shape that part of the city. That opportunity only comes once in a century.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I welcome the Minister's answers so far. I agree that this is a huge project, which is generally very welcome in north Belfast and wider Belfast. Is the Minister satisfied that the consultation has been comprehensive when we are talking about the impact that the proposal will have on local areas, such as Carrick Hill, as he pointed out, but also New Lodge, Tigers Bay and other areas around there?

Mr Attwood: The Member may be aware that, later this week, I will be meeting Community Places, together with residents of the local areas that he referred to, in order to bring forward their issues and concerns about the development. During the summer and autumn of last year, the community, especially the Carrick Hill community, demonstrated a great sense of dignity and resilience, and I think that they deserve particular respect around issues in that area, including in respect of this planning application.

I have had very frank conversations with the senior management of the University of Ulster about how they should manage the application and the character of the application. I think that we are moving forward, and I would like to see a recommendation going to the city council in respect of the main scheme in advance of the town planning meeting on 7 March. That said, I have major concerns, which the university knows about and Mr Kelly might be hinting at, in respect of a car parking proposal for Frederick Street. In the fullness of time, that part of the application may have to be separated from the main application in order to go forward.

Mr A Maginness: I think that this will be a great opportunity for north Belfast, and I agree with the Minister. Will he take into consideration and not prejudice the development of some element of social housing, which is needed in that area and which the local people are supportive of?

Mr Attwood: The issue of housing in that area needs careful management. We do not want to see a situation arise where we will have a Holylands II in the north side area between the 'Belfast Telegraph' building and Carrick Hill. There is the potential for that to happen. That is why I welcome the city council's Buchanan report, which, working with the various colleges in Belfast, can map out how the student housing issue might be dealt with over the next number of decades. At the same time, we have to recognise that there will be a demand for social housing in that area. Areas have previously been designated for housing, such as land at Frederick Street, and, in my view, that needs to be respected going forward. I do not think that development of all the available land for the university is the way forward. I believe that there needs to be balanced development, and that will include potential student housing and, most definitely, social housing.

Review of Public Administration

4. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the work currently under way in each of the council areas with regard to the review of public administration. *(AQO 3474/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: This issue was touched on in the first answer. Over the past 18 months, work has been taken forward by the various council clusters. As I indicated, we asked them to reply to a matrix of performance indicators. I think that I said there were 56 tasks, but there are 54 tasks in total. We asked for information in respect of 11 key tasks. According to the information provided by the councils that replied, 64% of what was required had been achieved and was on track, which means that, as we stand today, one third of the tasks that we consider to be crucial have not yet been achieved or are on track. Now that the financial situation has been confirmed, that should be a catalyst for councils to apply themselves to ensuring that all the key performance tasks are on track and will be done in time for the reorganisation in 2015.

3.15 pm

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answer. I refer you to your answer to a previous supplementary, when

you indicated that at least two councils had not replied to you at all on the key indicators. Does the Minister agree that all councils need to move together and that, if even one or two are dragging their heels, we will not achieve what we are trying to achieve through this review of public administration?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his supplementary. Although two councils have not yet replied to the questions that I raised, nine have replied, and that is the declaration of intent that I want to hear. Although there may be some doubt about some elements of the reform programme that councils are taking forward in the clusters, many are taking forward that work. The transition committee of Belfast City Council, for example, a council that Mr Newton will be very familiar with, meets twice a month, and its work programme is on the council website. Newtownabbey and Antrim councils are developing work on local development plans, a function that will pass to councils in 2015.

Although one council cluster on the north coast has not replied, I have met each and all of the transition committees. Although there may be concerns about local government reform, and whatever the difficulties may be — I do not discount them — I get a sense from across council clusters that they know that the 2015 date is for real.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Given what the Minister has said, does he now believe that we will meet the timeline for the introduction of shadow councils in 2014, and does he still believe that there is a need for them?

Mr Attwood: I believe in the principle of reform and that public policy, public organisations and the people of the North of Ireland have benefited from reform, however hesitantly some have come to it over the past 30 or 40 years. I believe that there is a need for a further phase of reform in Northern Ireland, of which this is just one example.

There are 750 days until the new councils go live, so the countdown is on. On local government legislation and boundaries and how we will fund this, I believe there is an adequate but not excessive amount of time in which to get this done and done right. I continue to honour that commitment. There was a bit of a hint from the Member of some doubt on his part. I trust that all Members and parties in the Chamber remain committed to that date and outcome.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister accept that there are significant tensions among some of the councils that it is proposed to merge? Maybe those tensions are one reason why not all councils replied, and maybe they exist among even those that did reply.

Mr Attwood: Change is a challenge, and I would be surprised if there were no tensions. It is only in the tension, I think, that you are able, at a cluster level, to work through the issues and work through them right. If everything was sweetness and light, this would have happened a long time ago, and we would not be having this conversation. The fact that there are tensions is not unhealthy, although some councils that it was speculated would have tensions are among those that replied and are getting on with the job of reorganisation.

Hydraulic Fracturing

5. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to claims by the Canadian doctor, Dr Eilish Cleary, regarding the health risks associated with hydraulic fracturing. *(AQO 3475/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I am aware of the evidence of Dr Eilish Cleary from Canada. Indeed, I think that there is wider evidence from Canada that can help to inform the debate on fracking and whether it should or should not happen. I have read some of Dr Cleary's views, and it seems to me that they are a checklist from the Canadian point of view not just on public health but on the range of concerns and considerations that might be associated with the proposal for fracking. Let me reassure the House and the people of Fermanagh and elsewhere that a health assessment would be integral to any environmental impact assessment, which would be required in the event that a planning application or applications were received for hydraulic fracturing in any part of Northern Ireland.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his answer, particularly given that he anticipated what my supplementary question would deal with. The Minister talked about a health impact assessment. Has he considered publishing draft guidelines that would inform the debate?

Mr Attwood: There are a number of answers to that. An interdepartmental working group exists, and I have asked that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety be represented on it. Although I sometimes stretch the competence of this office, I would not dare stretch it to comment decisively on issues of health. The point is that involving the Health Department in the ongoing interdepartmental work on the proposal is to recognise that there are health issues, which are multiple. I met the Environmental Protection Agency in America. Although many people talk about what happens under the ground with fracking and its impact on water quality, there is very much an issue about what happens to air quality above the ground, which is clearly a matter of health. As I said before, there will be no headlong rush to fracking. All environmental, planning and, indeed, health requirements will have to be satisfied by any proposal that is brought forward. We will examine all the research that is beginning to emerge around the proposal. That includes research that my Department is part funding and that is being taken forward by the Environmental Protection Agency in Dublin. My Department is represented on the steering group for that work. It is only when we have all the research and interrogated all the science that a decision can be made whether fracking, in principle, is or is not feasible.

Mr Campbell: The question asks for the Minister's assessment of one particular individual from Canada. Will he assure people across Northern Ireland that he will have an open mind to any benefits that might be derived as a result of fracking, in addition to any possible, however minuscule, health concerns?

Mr Attwood: She may be one individual, but she is the Chief Medical Officer of Health in New Brunswick in Canada. Therefore, she clearly speaks with a level of authority. To be fair about what she said at the seminar in Enniskillen recently, she gave advice from the Canadian perspective across a wide range of issues on hydraulic fracturing, not just health. People need to be careful. The information that she gave touched upon multiple issues that are relevant to the matter.

I will answer Mr Campbell's question more directly. Although I, as a member of my own party, have a view on the proposal of fracking, as a Minister, I have to step back. That is why I have laid down a number of principles: there should be no headlong rush to fracking, and the science, for and against, in Ireland, Britain, Europe, America and elsewhere, should be interrogated exhaustively. On the far side of the interrogation of the science, if a planning application is brought forward, which may be deemed to be article 31 significant because of its impact and may be subject to a public inquiry as a consequence, only at the end of all those processes might a conclusion be drawn on the matter.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I have listened carefully to what he has said, and he will agree that the negative publicity given to fracking scares the living daylights out of people. To clear the air, can the Minister give us an assurance that until there is absolute scientific proof that fracking is not dangerous, no planning approval will be given?

Mr Attwood: The reassurance that I will certainly give to the Member, the House and the citizens of Northern Ireland is that it is only after exhaustive interrogation of the science that any sensible Minister, Government or Assembly, wherever it might be, should make a judgement. It would be an aspiration to have absolute scientific assurance, but the nature of science is that it is not absolute. Very often, science can lead to conclusions one way or the other. My view is simply this: whatever about the view that I hold as a member of my party, if the science does not lead to the conclusion that this can be done safely, the wise counsel, I think, is that people have to reflect on whether it should be done at all.

Planning Policy Statement 18

6. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to review PPS 18 and supplementary guidelines. *(AQO 3476/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. At present, no, I do not have plans to review planning policy statement 18 (PPS 18) and the supplementary guidelines. In my time in this job, I think that I have demonstrated that I do not shirk looking again at planning policy statements or guidelines. I could give you a family of examples of where I have looked at planning policy statements, be they on natural heritage, tourism, enabling development or retail. Although I am very aware of issues that increasingly are being identified around the operation of PPS 18 and the impact of wind farms, wind turbines and other renewable plant, I have not been convinced, at this stage, that there are compelling reasons to review PPS 18.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Is the Minister aware that 48% of all wind turbine applications are in the constituency of West Tyrone and that areas, such as the hills above Drumquin, have reached saturation point? Will he consider any plans to introduce thresholds on an area-by-area basis?

Mr Attwood: It is already the case that the principle of cumulative impact is in place at a strategic planning level, when it comes to the assessment of wind farms, and at a local divisional level, when it comes to the assessment of wind turbines. Therefore, cumulative impact on various locations in a divisional planning area office is a threshold that is in place and will apply when it comes to making decisions on farms or individual turbines. In that regard, given that the principle of cumulative impact is already accepted, it is, in effect, a level of threshold when it comes to those decisions.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister feel that there is any conflict between his Department and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) regarding the way forward on renewable energy?

Mr Attwood: I am not quite sure what the question may be hinting at. In any case, I can answer only from my point of view, which is that renewable energy is Ireland's biggest economic opportunity. The quality of our wind, wave and tide is the best in the world, and the aspiration to be self-sufficient in electricity and to become an exporter of electricity is conceivable and not beyond our capability. When it comes to the jobs around renewables, be they in manufacturing, research and development, construction or ongoing maintenance for renewable plant, it seems to me to be the way to go. We have an obligation to ensure that 40% of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2020, and, according to the current trend, we are going to fulfil that obligation. That is my view. If that is DETI's view, there is no conflict between us.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of the Environment.

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The House is well aware of Mr Speaker's concern, and, I presume, that of the wider House, about the non-appearance at Question Time of Members who tabled questions.

Given that it happened again today, perhaps you could inform Mr Speaker. As well as people not being in their place, it would appear — I received an email indicating the questions that were withdrawn, as, I am sure, did all other Members. Question 11 to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure was not on that list. Perhaps Mr Speaker could investigate that.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for putting that on the record. There was an administrative issue. Certainly, what he has said has been put on the record today. If necessary, the Speaker can take up the issue.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, would you like to remind the House of what the procedure is when questions are being withdrawn? As my colleague Mr Campbell has already stated, it was clear at the outset that question 3 to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure had been withdrawn and that questions 5, 13 and 4 had been grouped. There was no mention of question 11. Did I miss it? I suspect that I did. However, do tell us.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I invite the Member to have further discussions with the Speaker's Office. I understand that there was an administrative issue in that regard. We will move on.

Executive Committee Business

Antarctic Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mr Deputy Speaker: This is a rather unusual topic.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension of the Antarctic Bill to Northern Ireland including the provision making the regulation of activities in Antarctica an excepted matter.*

I am delighted to address the House on this hot topic. It is important that in our society now, this House is not a cold house for anyone.

The Assembly will be aware that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have laid a legislative consent memorandum in which they seek support for a legislative consent motion in respect of the Westminster Antarctic Bill to Northern Ireland. The Bill includes a provision that the regulation of activities in Antarctica should be made an excepted matter with regard to our devolution settlement.

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

It might be useful to Members if I briefly outline the background to the issue. The UK Antarctic Act 1994 implemented the protocol on environmental protection to the international Antarctic treaty. That established a regulatory and permitting regime for all British expeditions and nationals who travel to Antarctica. It applies UK-wide. The primary aim of the current Bill is to implement in domestic law a new annex to that protocol to the Antarctic treaty that relates to the prevention of and response to any environmental emergencies in the Antarctic. Part 1 of the Bill does that by requiring all of those who intend to undertake activities in Antarctica to take preventative measures to minimise the risk and the potential impact of environmental emergencies and to develop contingency plans for responding to any such emergency situation. In addition, Part 2 of the Bill includes proposals to enhance environmental protection in Antarctica, particularly for marine plants and invertebrates.

The key issue, however, is the reclassification of Antarctic matters as excepted in terms of the Northern Ireland devolution settlement. To date, all legislation on the regulation of activities in Antarctica has been made on a UK-wide basis. Any relevant functions have been carried out by the UK Government. However, during the drafting of the Antarctic Bill, it was identified that the Antarctic and the subject matter of the Antarctic Act 1994 had inadvertently been devolved to legislators in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. In our case, the matter of regulation of activities in the Antarctic was omitted from schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. I add that, although the matter is technically devolved here, no relevant functions were transferred with it, so no Department here has any legislative powers in relation to the Antarctic. An Assembly Bill would be required to confer such powers if they were considered necessary, although the purposes for which those would be sought are not immediately clear.

The UK Government wish to rectify the situation on the basis of the need for a single coherent regulatory approach to its international obligations under the Antarctic Treaty. Subsequently, with the consent of the Scottish Parliament, they made it a reserved matter as far as Scotland is concerned through the Scotland Act 2012.

Having considered the UK Government's request, the First Minister and deputy First Minister believe that there is no compelling reason to argue for the continued devolution of Antarctic matters. Having obtained the agreement of the Executive to do so, they wish to seek the agreement of the Assembly, by means of the legislative consent motion before us today, that the matter of the regulation of activities in Antarctica should be made an excepted one in schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Bell: I will give way in a second. You can ask whatever questions you want, and I will respond to them, if that is the appropriate protocol.

Although I appreciate that the Assembly would normally, and rightly, be reluctant to concede any diminution in its legislative competence in any area, I hope that Members will agree that it is sensible to do so in the circumstances of this very special case. Therefore, I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Clearly, there is a great deal of interest in the motion: we have one Member who wishes to speak.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the Minister for that very fulsome and clear explanation. The Committee was briefed by officials on 6 February 2013. Officials explained the need for this legislative consent motion. Following the briefing, the Committee agreed that it was content to support the legislative consent motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We have a late entry: Mr Jim Allister.

Mr Allister: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was trying to intervene, but I am quite happy to do it this way. I support the legislative consent motion. I was going to ask the junior Minister whether he thought that Antarctica might not be as cold a house for unionists as Belfast City Hall. Antarctica, of course, being one of —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member will resume his seat. I get the impression that the Member wants to veer off the subject. I ask him to return to Antarctica.

Mr Allister: As I understand it, British Antarctica is one of 14 British overseas territories. As such, it proudly flies the Union flag. There is no restriction on the number of days on which it flies the Union flag. I was just wondering whether it would be a warmer house for unionists than Belfast City Hall. Happily, part of British Antarctica has been named Queen Elizabeth Land in honour of the jubilee. Will the Minister tell us whether the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), in all its parts, embraces and supports that?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that the junior Minister is now in a position to respond to the rather interesting and diverse debate.

Mr Bell: I thank the two Members who contributed to this interesting debate, particularly the Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for conveying the Committee's support for the motion.

I also thank the Committee for considering the matter within a very tight timescale and producing its report so expeditiously, given that it had no previous background on the subject matter prior to the laying of the legislative consent memorandum.

I am trying not to smile.

Although I appreciate that some might find it strange — *[Interruption.]* I am getting it from both angles now. Although I appreciate that some might find it strange that the Assembly is taking time to discuss the matter of Antarctica and may feel that the motion is of little consequence to the matters that the House normally involves itself in, nevertheless, a key constitutional point is at stake; namely, that the legislative competence of the Assembly should neither be restricted nor expanded without its agreement. That has been the basis of our discussions with the UK Government on this issue. At all times, we emphasised the need to ensure that the Assembly was given its proper place by bringing this legislative consent motion before it today.

I have thanked the contributors to the debate, including the Chair of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Mr Allister asked about the flying of flags. The Finance Minister said that there are no Alliance Party penguins in Antarctica, which caused a bit of a laugh. My position is that I support the respectful and dignified flying of the Union flag, and I have said that at other times in the House. I said earlier —

Mr Weir: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Bell: Yes.

Mr Weir: Does the Minister agree that this is obviously an issue of particular interest to many unionists? Indeed, there has been a long unionist connection with Antarctica, as one of the most famous Antarctic explorers, Sir Ernest Shackleton, stood as a unionist candidate in the past. Not, I have to say, in Antarctica. Although I am sure that Members are well experienced of long driveways when they are canvassing, I think that that might be particularly lengthy.

Not only does the Union flag fly there but there is the added advantage that, during one of the seasons in Antarctica, the daylight effectively lasts the entire day. Therefore, the Union flag can be seen for long periods of time.

Mr Bell: From my own position, the longer it flies the better — from dawn to dusk. The Honourable Member has made his point.

As a loyal subject of Her Majesty the Queen, I am also delighted that a part of the Antarctic has been named in her honour.

I said earlier that we have had an interesting debate on Antarctica today, even if it is not a matter that we would have expected to have some responsibility for. I hope that all Members agree that it is a responsibility that can be surrendered without any adverse practical effect on our competence to legislate in the future. I also hope that all Members will agree that that will result in a clarification of responsibilities for the regulation of activities in such an important area of the world and, as my colleague pointed out, that some of my distinguished unionist forebears were key to exploring.

I again ask for the support of the House in passing the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: After that rather interesting and diverse debate, I think that we have arrived at the crucial moment when we will surrender Antarctica.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension of the Antarctic Bill to Northern Ireland including the provision making the regulation of activities in Antarctica an excepted matter.

Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next three items of business are motions from the Minister of Finance and Personnel relating to statutory rules. There will be separate debates on each. Only the motion on the Rates (Regional Rates) Order requires cross-community support.

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

> *That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.*

I can assure the House that none of these regulations apply to Antarctica or to any other parts other than Northern Ireland. They are, nevertheless, important issues, because they have a grave impact on services and people across Northern Ireland. The first one that I want to bring to the Assembly is the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013.

3.45 pm

This scheme was initially introduced in 2007 for a three-year period, with the objective of encouraging and sustaining the provision of ATMs in rural areas. I believe that this policy objective remains a worthy aim in today's economic climate. The initial scheme was due to finish in March 2010. However, in November 2009, my Department undertook an evaluation of the merits of its operation. A range of research and analysis was undertaken along with consultation with key stakeholders, including the Rural Community Network, the Consumer Council and banking representatives. The view of the Finance and Personnel Committee was also sought at that time.

As a result of that evaluation, it was decided to extend the scheme for three years, a decision that ensured the scheme's existence until 31 March this year. Given the continued provision of ATMs in rural areas and a further increase in their numbers since the scheme was retained in 2010, I propose that it would be prudent to extend the exemption for a further three-year period. The legislation before the Assembly, therefore, continues the scheme until the end of the Budget period in March 2015.

I will turn briefly to what the scheme does. The exemption is provided for stand-alone ATMs that are individually valued on the valuation list, for example, those located outside petrol stations or on high streets. It does not apply to those located in banks or building societies, which tend to be valued as part of that property. As of November 2011, 55 ATMs were eligible for exemption, an increase from the 37 that were eligible when the scheme was introduced in 2007. I recognise that the increase is relatively small, but I believe that it is important to those who benefit from it.

The current cost of the scheme is around £113,000 of revenue that we forgo. I consider that to be an affordable sum, given the benefits that it can bring. There is a risk that the removal of this measure now could jeopardise the viability of machines that are currently exempt, thus having a detrimental economic impact on the communities that they serve. ATMs play a vital role in the sustainability of rural economies. Evidence shows that money withdrawn locally tends to be spent locally. Of every £10 withdrawn from a cash machine, almost two thirds is spent locally. On that basis, I consider that the current exemption for ATMs in rural areas should be extended for a further three years.

My Executive colleagues and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee have already been advised of the detail of the statutory rule. The Committee indicated that it was content for individual, separately valued ATMs in designated rural areas to continue to be exempt from rates, particularly given the modest cost of the scheme. Article 1 of the order sets out the citation, commencement and interpretation provisions. Article 2 provides for the extension of the relevant date, before which the scheme must end, to 1 April 2015.

In conclusion, I look forward to Members' comments and commend the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 to the House.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sé. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks.

Ag a chruinniú ar 7 Samhain 2012, d'amharc an Coiste ar chomhfhreagras ón Aire maidir le meaisíní uathoibríocha airgid saorsheasta i siopaí agus i staisiúin artola a bheas saor ó rátaí i mbardaí áirithe faoin tuath. The Committee, at its meeting on 7 November 2012, considered correspondence from the Minister on the rates exemption for stand-alone ATMs in designated rural wards.

The Committee noted that the measure, which provides full rates exemption for eligible ATMs, was introduced in 2007 as part of a package of rate relief measures that were aimed at rural areas. Initially, the scheme was to last for three years, ending on 31 March 2010, but, following an evaluation by the Department, and with the Committee's support, the decision was taken to extend the scheme for a further three years until 31 March this year. At that time, the Committee noted that banks had advised that rates exemption did not affect the decision on the provision of new ATMs but may be a consideration when deciding whether to retain existing ATMs.

The Committee noted from the Minister's correspondence in November that stakeholders that were consulted at the time of the original evaluation, including banks, rural community representatives and the Consumer Council, were all extremely supportive of retaining the exemption. The location of the ATMs receiving the exemption also showed that the most isolated rural communities were benefiting most from it.

The Committee agreed with the Minister's proposal to retain the scheme until the end of the Budget period, but it sought clarification on the number of ATMs that had been installed as a result of the scheme. As the Minister said here today, and as his correspondence confirmed, there were 37 rural ATMs at the time that the policy was introduced in 2007, and, by September 2012, there were 55. That is a growth of 18 ATMs over the period that the scheme had been in operation. The Minister was also of the view that the relief may be influencing the retention of ATMs in rural areas.

At its meeting of 28 November the Committee considered the proposal to make the order, and it had no objection to the policy proposals at that time. The formal statutory rule that is before the Assembly today was considered at the Committee's meeting on 13 February 2013, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Examiner raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Assembly affirm the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013. I therefore, on behalf of the Committee, support the motion. Go raibh míle maith agat. Thank you very much.

Mr Wilson: I do not think that there is a great deal for me to say, other than to thank the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for his remarks and to thank the Committee for the work that it did on the matter and for the way in which it confirmed that it believes that this is a policy worth continuing. I emphasise that 200 wards in rural areas are covered by the policy across Northern Ireland and that they tend to be the most deprived wards.

All the evidence is that, although this measure may cause only a marginal increase in the number of new ATMs coming into those areas, there have been increases, as the Deputy Chairperson pointed out. It probably is an important measure. The relief amounts to about £2,000 a machine, and it is probably a measure that ensures that those machines stay in rural areas. Of course, with the closure of a lot of bank branches, having access to cash is important. Having access to that cash locally, where people then tend to spend it in shops locally, is also important to the sustainability of the rural community. For all those reasons, I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

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

That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

As Members will be aware, the Rates (Regional Rates) Order is brought forward annually and stems from the Executive's agreed Budget, which was originally brought to the Assembly back in March 2011. That Budget covers the four-year period from 2011-15. Members will also be aware that the regional rate supplements Northern Ireland's share of relevant public expenditure.

The regional rate provides additional revenue over and above the Barnett settlement, helping to fund departmental expenditure on hospitals, roads, schools and other essential public services, and investment.

To underline the significance of the rating system, over £1 billion is now collected in rates, regional and district, domestic and non-domestic. Taken together, the domestic and commercial regional rate will raise £627 million in the next rating year.

I will describe the breakdown of rate bills. The regional rate represents just over half of the typical bill, with the other half being made up of district rates, which are set independently by local councils. When the four-year Budget was agreed, the Executive pledged that the regional rate would be frozen in real terms until 2014-15 to provide certainty and stability for businesses and households to plan and manage their finances.

A real-terms freeze is adjusted for the effect of inflation. We are using the Treasury gross domestic product (GDP) deflator as an inflationary measure. That is the lowest measure of inflation that there is. In comparison with other inflation indices, it could be argued that there is a real-terms decrease in rates over the period.

The legislation that is before the House for approval today is the simple outworking of an important Budget decision that we have already made. It will fix two regional rates in the pound for 2013-14: one for households; and one for business ratepayers. The new rates in the pound represent a small increase of 2·7% in the regional rate for the 2013-14 rating year for households and businesses.

The Executive are committed to ensuring that household and commercial budgets are protected, given the continuing economic difficulties that are being faced across the board. Contrast that with the average rise of over 10% in the regional rate across the last four years of direct rule. The order therefore represents the best that we can do to balance the interests of ratepayers and the demands of public expenditure.

Some may argue that the regional rate should be reduced to alleviate the pressures of the continued economic downturn, which is affecting the domestic and non-domestic sectors. The economic pressures of the past five years have been unprecedented, but I firmly believe that the Executive have taken a sensible and measured approach. Any cut in the regional rate would mean a reduction in resources for other areas.

The regional rate increases were agreed at the start of the Budget period in line with the Executive's projected expenditure. Holding the regional rate constant in real terms also complements the commercial rating measures introduced since April 2012.

One of the measures included at that time was a levy on large retail premises, which was designed to rebalance the burden of rates on the business sector. This year's order also serves to fix the additional regional rate in the pound that is to be levied on large retail premises, which is otherwise known as the large retail levy. The large retail levy is set at an additional 15%, on average, to the large retail premises rates liability. The levy also increases in accordance with the non-domestic and domestic regional rate increases.

That levy has gone some way to funding the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme, which now assists around 24,000 small businesses in Northern Ireland. In addition, manufacturing rates continue to be held at 30%, helping around 4,500 manufacturing businesses. That is an economic support measure that is unique to Northern Ireland.

Over half Northern Ireland business ratepayers now receive some form of rate relief.

4.00 pm

The Executive have gone to considerable lengths to provide that level of support, continuing to put the interests of business first by looking at ways to help firms through the downturn. In the domestic sector, decisions taken by the Executive and Assembly on domestic rates and the funding of water have ensured that the average household in Northern Ireland continues to pay the lowest charges in the United Kingdom, and by some distance. Of course, that benefits business too, because it means that households have more disposable income and, therefore, more money to spend in local businesses.

My approach, and that of my Executive colleagues, continues to be that we will not dip into the pockets of households and local businesses any more than is necessary until we have made all the savings that there are to be made in delivering efficient and effective regional government and public services.

That is enough context. These are all matters that were carefully considered and agreed when we set the Budget. Allow me to move on to the more technical matters that are covered in the draft order.

The order's main purpose is to give effect to the decisions made during the Budget process by specifying the regional rate poundages for 2013-14. Article 1 sets out the title of the order and gives the operational date as the day after it is affirmed by the Assembly. Article 2 provides that the order will apply in the 2013-14 rating year through to 31 March 2014. Article 3 specifies 33·02 pence in the pound as the commercial regional poundage and 0·3882 pence in the pound as the domestic regional rate poundage. Article 4 specifies 8·7 pence in the pound as the additional regional rate in respect of large retail hereditaments.

I look forward to hearing Members' comments, and I commend the order to the Assembly.

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas fosta leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sé ina chuid cainte i dtosach báire. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks.

The 2011-15 Budget, which was agreed by the previous Assembly on 7 March 2011, proposed that both domestic and non-domestic regional rate increases should be uplifted only in line with inflation. The purpose of today's rule is to set the rate of uplift for 2013-14. It also provides for the continuation of the levy on large retailers, which was introduced in April 2012 as a measure towards rebalancing the rating system by funding an extension of the small business rate relief scheme.

The policy proposals contained in the statutory rule were considered by the Committee on 28 November 2012. The Committee had no issues to raise in respect of these policy proposals at that time. The Committee formally considered the statutory rule that is before the Assembly today at its meeting on 13 February 2013, together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, which had no points to raise by way of technical scrutiny of the rule.

D'aontaigh an coiste an rún seo a mholadh don tionól. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed by the Assembly. I, therefore, support the motion on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Deputy Chairman for his contribution. I also thank him for always giving me warning of when I should start looking for my notes for closing the debate. He goes into this flourish of Irish which I do not understand a word of, but I know that it is a signal of, "You will be on your feet in about 30 seconds, so find your notes so that you can conclude the debate."

The fact that there has been very little contribution is probably an indication of one of two things. Either Members are fed up listening to me and just want to get me to sit down quickly, or Members are reasonably content that the decisions on rates that we have made in the Budget are, as I have said, a measured and balanced approach to the whole issue of rates. We have to raise money for the public services that people in Northern Ireland rightly demand. On the other hand, we should not be taxing people to a level that impacts on their living standards, especially when we are in the middle of an economic recession.

The Assembly and the Executive have got the balance right. We have to maintain the additional money that rates give us for all of the vital things that we deliver, and, at the same time, we should not go down the draconian route that we had under direct rule, when people were getting hit with 10% increases every year. Of course, that was during better economic times, when you could have argued that the Assembly had more money because more money was coming from the Exchequer at Westminster.

We have had to design our expenditure policies to facilitate the kind of restraint that we have shown on rates. That has benefited households and businesses. Sometimes, the Assembly is not given credit for the decisions that we make in this area. Other authorities across the United Kingdom, when it comes to the difficult decisions that have to be made on expenditure, immediately turn to ratepayers and think that they will bail them out and make money available to them. We have not done that, and

that should be recognised as one of the very significant contributions that we have made to household budgets at this time of recession. For that reason, I have pleasure in recommending this order to the Assembly for its affirmation.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Mr Wilson: I beg to move

That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Before dealing with the statutory rule, I will set out some background to the measure. The purpose of the legislation is to extend the empty shops rates concession, which I implemented in April last year. That concession was introduced as an amendment to the Rates (Amendment) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2012, which was scrutinised by Members during debates in February last year. At that time, I was introducing a package of measures aimed at rebalancing the rating system, assisting ailing businesses and improving the appearance of our towns and city centres.

The empty shops rates concession provides a one-year concession, which effectively allows 50% empty-property relief to continue for one year when a qualifying property, which has been empty for at least one year, becomes occupied again. The current legislative provision under article 31D of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, as inserted by the Rates (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012, permits applications for that concession until 31 March 2013.

The window for applications closes soon, and, following some early analysis of the success of the scheme, I have made the decision to extend the application period for another two years, taking us to the end of the Budget period.

To date, over 90 businesses have been successful in their applications for the scheme. There have been over 150 applications, most of which have been dealt with by Land and Property Services (LPS). Members often criticise LPS for its slowness in assessing some of these things, but given the amount of work that is required to do these assessments, I think that it is commendable that it has done nearly 150 assessments. Some 93 businesses, I think, have now benefited as a result. Of course, that means more employment and more footfall in town centres.

Unfortunately, there remains a need to provide whatever assistance we can to counteract the many shop closures and the effect that that has on the vitality of our towns and cities. I have seen the effects of the prolonged period of downturn in my constituency and in other towns and cities that I visit as part of my ministerial role. The extension of this concession will allow LPS to continue to receive applications for the scheme until the end of March 2015.

I have to say that the scheme has been a good one so far and has led to 92 businesses opening and getting up and running across Northern Ireland. I have visited a range of businesses that have benefited from the scheme, including a fish market in Enniskillen, a children's shop in Larne, a gift shop in Londonderry, a retro scooter shop in Carrickfergus and a restaurant in Belfast. Tomorrow — maybe it is Thursday — I am going to a shop on the Donegall Road that has opened as a result of the scheme. Of course, all of that creates new jobs for local people.

It may not be a big-bang policy in terms of its impact, but as is the case with many of the policies that the

Assembly introduces, it is one more small piece in helping to revitalise our economy. That is important. Sometimes, people look for schemes that suddenly hit the headlines and bring about thousands of jobs. It is very often the little initiatives that Ministers, the Executive and officials come up with that lead to improvements. I think that this is one of those policies. It will help to add to the revitalisation of town centres and arterial routes.

It is also a sensible measure in terms of cost. The Executive would not have been getting any more money in from these units through rates if they had continued to be empty anyway. So, this is effectively a cost-neutral policy. Indeed, looking longer term, these businesses will end up paying full rates after the difficult first year of trading is over, so it may prove to earn us money in the long run.

It is a unique "made in Northern Ireland" policy, and I promised the Assembly that I would review it in-year. My Department has undertaken that work. My officials have found no instances of it being misused. In other words, there is no evidence of displacement, and I think that it is entirely sensible to continue with it in order to help to reduce the number of empty shops on our high streets.

Such has been the success of our scheme that Scotland has already announced that it is replicating our policy from April of next year. As Members may be aware, shortly after I announced the policy last year, it featured in the final recommendations of the Mary Portas report on high streets. The Welsh are now considering following suit. So, we have led the way, and it has been one of those innovative policies that, happily, is being copied elsewhere.

I turn now to the statutory rule itself. My Executive colleagues and members of the Finance and Personnel Committee have been advised on its detail. The Committee indicated that it was content for the empty shops rates concession to continue until 31 March 2015. Article 1 of the order sets out the citation and commencement. Article 2 provides for the amendment of Article 31D of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977, substituting the new end date of 31 March 2015. In conclusion, I look forward to Members' comments, and I commend the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 to the House.

4.15 pm

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an méid a dúirt sé ina chuid cainte i dtosach báire. I thank the Minister for his opening remarks.

Cuireadh an Coiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra ar an eolas faoin mholadh le caoga faoin gcéad d'ísliú rátaí a chur ar fáil do dhaoine atá ag glacadh seilbhe ar shiopaí folmha nuair a thug an tAire eolas dóibh ar 11 Eanáir 2012. The Minister has more than 70 seconds to go.

The Committee for Finance and Personnel was first advised of the proposal to provide 50% relief for one year to the new occupier of an empty shop during a ministerial briefing on 11 January 2012. This was an amendment to the Rates (Amendment) Bill, the other provisions of which the Committee had already considered in some detail and reported on to the Assembly. Members heard that, to qualify, a shop needed to be empty for at least a year and that new businesses would not be limited to the retail sector. It was proposed that the measure, intended to bring empty shops back into use and rejuvenate town centres, would last only for the 2012-13 rating year.

In response to members' questions, the Minister advised that the scheme was not funded but that some revenue would be forgone in the first year of occupancy. In the longer term, it could of course be beneficial because of the rates that would be collected from a more established business. The draft amendment was subsequently considered by the Committee at its meeting on 18 January 2012, and the Chairperson confirmed the Committee's support for the measure in his speech to the Assembly on 24 January 2012.

On 24 October 2012, the Committee received a briefing from a senior Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) official on a range of rating issues, which included the empty shops rates concession. Members heard that, at that point, 32 businesses had made successful applications to the relief, although subsequent correspondence confirmed that the number had risen to 42 by the end of October. It was estimated that the rates forgone totalled £80,000. However, DFP did not think that the businesses would have set up without the rates concession.

During the evidence session, the Committee also heard that the Scottish Government had announced a similar scheme for 2013, and the Welsh Assembly Government were considering the introduction of a similar scheme. The DFP official advised that the Minister was considering extending the scheme for the remainder of this Budget period and explained the steps being taken to promote and raise awareness of it.

Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to support the extension of the empty properties rates concession. The Committee subsequently considered the proposal for the rule before us today at its meeting on 28 November 2012 and agreed that it had no objection to the policy proposals. The rule was formally considered at the Committee's meeting on 13 February 2013, and it was noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules had no issues to raise by way of technical scrutiny.

D'aontaigh an Coiste an rún seo a mholadh don Tionól. The Committee agreed to recommend that the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed by the Assembly, so, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for the verbal wink or nod that he was ready for me to wind on the debate. I thank him for the comments that he made on behalf of the Committee and, once again, for the Committee's work on the issue.

I do not want to add a great deal to what I said in my opening speech. The Deputy Chairman referred to the number of businesses that have benefited and the approximate cost. He said that, by October, 42 businesses had applied and been successful. Between October and now, that figure has gone up by 50, so we now have 92. I think that that shows that, as the scheme becomes better known, more people are applying for it. Of course, assessments have to be done.

Although he talked about revenue forgone, I like to think that we will not lose any money from this. If the property remains empty, we get 50% of the rates anyway, and we

get only 50%. If we allow the property to be occupied for a year, still at 50%, we are getting only what we would have got anyhow had the property remained empty. Had full rates been applied to the 92 properties that have been forgone, revenue would have been £225,000. However, as I said, had the shop remained empty, we would not have been getting that revenue anyhow. If the shops remain occupied for a further year, we will have recouped all that money, because we get the 100% rates in the second year, and anything after the second year is additional revenue.

So, I see this as a way of pump-priming the local economy, getting businesses in and eventually, of course, having them pay their full contribution in rates. There would also be all the other attendant benefits, such as additional employment, additional activity, the improvement of town centres and arterial routes as a result of that business activity and, of course, the benefit that there will be to local people having another new business open in their areas. So, there are many benefits to this, and I do not think that we should look at this as a policy through which the Executive are handing out money. This is simply a policy where, for one year, we accept that we will get only 50% of the rates, which is all that we would have got anyway had the business not opened. After that, there is a net benefit to the public purse as a result of the rates that come in.

As I said and as the Deputy Chairman alluded to, this is a policy where we in Northern Ireland led the way. It is having benefits right across, and there is not a constituency that is represented here where the benefit has not been felt. I know that the Deputy Chairperson's constituency includes more than just Newry and Mourne, but 10 businesses in that area have benefited from this. As I said, all constituencies seem to have benefited, some to a greater extent than others. I commend the order to the Assembly, and I trust that it will receive Assembly assent today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Committee Business

Sport: Grass-root and Elite Sports Facilities

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the target in the Sport Matters strategy to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities by 2014 that will support player and athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to consider prioritising funding towards grass-root sports and elite facilities from within her existing budget, to ensure that our sportspeople competing in future Olympic and Commonwealth Games are not disadvantaged as a result of lack of investment.*

I will begin by providing some context and background to the reasons behind the Committee tabling the motion. Mr Deputy Speaker, as you will be aware, the Committee and, indeed, the Assembly are on record as recognising the dedication, commitment and success of all our sportspeople following their superb achievements at the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. However, the Committee felt that, although it is important to acknowledge those achievements, it is more important to ensure that there is a genuine lasting legacy for all our sportspeople following the games.

To that end, the Committee agreed in September 2012 to conduct a focused review to explore the issues and challenges facing our sportspeople to get a better understanding of what they need to build on their successes at international competitions and to increase participation in their respective sports. That is why the Committee then wrote to the governing bodies of competitive sports to get their assessment of the legacy of the 2012 games, the challenges facing their sport and measures that could be taken to address them, and the relationship between grass-roots and elite sports.

As a part of the review, the Committee also invited the governing bodies to attend a stakeholder event on 22 September last year, at which those issues were discussed in much greater depth. Some 22 sports governing bodies were represented at that event. Sports that participated in the review included athletics, badminton, tennis, swimming, martial arts, motorsport, cycling, and water- and equestrian-based sports. The review did not include the so-called big-three sports — football, GAA and rugby — which have seen, and will see, significant capital investment in this comprehensive spending review (CSR) period. The Committee wanted to focus its attention on the needs of other sports to see how they might capitalise on the successes and maximise the benefits of the London games ahead of the Rio Olympics in 2016 and, more immediately, the Glasgow Commonwealth Games in 2014.

The Committee is aware of the Minister's commitment to sport, as outlined in her Sport Matters strategy. Indeed, there are no less than 25 targets in the strategy, aspiring to create a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport.

At its inception in 2009, the strategy noted that, in the provision of sporting facilities, Northern Ireland is under-provided for compared with other regions in the United Kingdom and Europe. Therefore, it is good to note that in the recently published 'Sport Matters Implementation Group Progress Report' for October 2011 to September 2012 — indeed, it was published only in the past two weeks — the target to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities that will support Northern Ireland player and athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports by 2014 is reported as having been achieved.

Despite that, many governing bodies reported common challenges during the Committee's review that suggest that the issues facing sport organisations may have a negative impact on the development of our players and athletes and on the future growth and success of their sport. It is perhaps not surprising that one of the main challenges that many of the sports faced was that they had limited or no access to funding. The impacts of that varied across the different sports. Many of the governing bodies reported that current sport facilities were inadequate and did not provide a proper environment for competitive training. Some reported the need for an elite training facility or centre of excellence so that high-end performers can train and practise in first-class conditions. Other sports found their players having to travel outside Northern Ireland to train for international competitions. Furthermore, with little or no funding available for participation in international competitions, some sports have to make a choice about attending events or selecting a team based on players' ability to afford travel costs as opposed to their ability to compete. The Committee was concerned about the impact that that practice would have on those sports in the longer term.

Another consequence of the lack of adequate facilities is that some sports are unable to attract events to Northern Ireland. Given the anticipated benefits to Northern Ireland of Belfast hosting the World Police and Fire Games in August — not least the arrival of 25,000 visitors — I am sure that Members agree that we should take every opportunity to attract sporting events and that the condition of our current facilities should not be an obstacle to achieving that.

The Committee is mindful of the pressures on the Minister's budget and acknowledges the difficult job that she has in balancing investment with tangible benefits. However, the Committee calls on her to ensure that the smaller sports are not overlooked for investment. Although their spectator and participation numbers may be lower than those of the big-three sports, without any investment those other sports will never have the opportunity to grow and develop.

The Committee heard that, for some sports, an investment of around £10,000 would make an enormous difference to participation across the board. Other sports, however, were in need of a much larger capital investment. We heard, for example, that athletics, cycling and tennis all need an indoor sports facility. Other sports, such as hockey, highlighted the need for a specific type of surface for their pitches.

4.30 pm

As Members will be aware, one of my constituents, Martyn Irvine, won silver and gold medals at the world track cycling championships in Minsk last week, and that was raised in the Assembly this morning. In the past few days, the spotlight has been put on the amount of funding that has been invested in cycling in Northern Ireland and the need for an indoor facility. Martyn Irvine and Wendy Houvenaghel have had tremendous success without that local investment, but what more could be achieved with it?

The Committee recognises that local councils also have a role to play in the provision of those facilities. However, that, in itself, comes with some unique challenges, given the financial constraints that many councils face. The Committee heard that surfaces were not maintained to the standard required, and swimming reported that there was limited access to the facilities and that that often clashed with public opening times.

Another challenge facing sports was the relationship with funding for grass-root and elite sports. Many report that, where funding was available, it was directed at high-performance and elite sportspeople. However, there were concerns that more investment was needed at grass-roots level to ensure a long-term legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games. There was recognition that elite performers rise from grass-roots level and, therefore, it was essential to invest at that level to ensure that elite sportspeople emerge.

Governing bodies also recognise the commitment and dedication of their volunteers. However, many found that, to properly grow, full-time development officers were needed. The Committee also heard that improvements are needed to our coaching and mentoring systems to enable sports to develop top-quality coaches capable of getting the best performance from our sportspeople.

Lack of visibility of smaller sports was also identified as a challenge. That was attributed to the absence of those sports in the school curriculum, lack of competitions held here and low profile in the media. Lack of visibility also had an impact on sports failing to attract private sponsors, therefore creating a reliance on public funding.

Over the past year, the Minister has demonstrated her commitment to sport through an additional investment of £1·5 million each to the IFA, the GAA and the IRFU over the next three years to tackle poverty and social exclusion in those sports. The Minister has also made available £3·27 million for boxing. However, the Committee calls on the Minister to assess how her Department can assist other sports to address the challenges that they face. Given the current economic climate, the Committee appreciates that there is not a bottomless pot of money. However, if those sports do not receive additional investment, any legacy from the Olympic and Paralympic Games will not be realised, as our grass-roots players will not develop and our elite sportspeople will not compete on an even keel against their competitors.

The Committee urges the Minister to talk with those sports to gain a fuller understanding of their needs and to identify areas for investment. Today's economic climate means that we all need to think outside the box. Therefore, that investment may come in the form of a shared sports facility or access to schools, colleges and university facilities. Therefore, the Committee also urges the Minister to talk with her ministerial colleagues in the Department of Education, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

to secure access. For those sports where a one-size-fits-all approach will not fit, the Committee urges the Minister to provide investment, particularly at times when she finds herself in a position to reallocate funds from within her existing budget. It is only through investment to improve facilities that we will deliver high-performance players and athletes and make our mark on the world's sports stage.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Miss M McIlveen: In conclusion, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all those Members who will contribute to today's debate and encourage them to support the motion. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo inniu. There is no doubt that the success of some of our local athletes at the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics has given a boost to local sport. Níl dabht ar bith ann gur tugadh spreagadh do spórt áitiúil mar gheall ar rath ár lúthchleasaithe áitiúla i gcluichí Oilimpeacha agus Parailimpeacha, 2012. Success begets success, and that is surely one of the reasons why we have such an upsurge in interest in sports such as boxing, to name but one, but I am sure that it is the same for other sports that have produced champions.

Those achievements will have inspired many former sporting fans to get back into a sport from which they may have lapsed or to become involved in a new sport or even just to reconnect with some physical activity. The fact is that the recent successes have been good for us locally, as they have encouraged and inspired us. Over the past few days, we have seen even more success for Irish athletes as they continue to take more titles and medals at all levels. Martyn Irvine, Katie Taylor and the women's rugby team spring to mind immediately.

As a result of this new focus on local sport, many more of us are looking to see how we can participate and what facilities are available to allow us to do that. De thoradh an fhócais nua seo ar spórt áitiúil tá níos mó againn ag iarraidh a fháil amach cad é mar is féidir linn páirt a ghlacadh i spórt agus cad iad na háiseanna atá ar fáil leis sin a dhéanamh. On the back of the 2012 success, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure undertook a survey to establish the conditions for local sports to find out what issues they were facing. A stakeholder event was held in November 2012, and although there were specific issues for individual sports, there were common themes affecting them all, such as the need to further develop and grow their sport at grass-roots and elite sports levels. So, clearly, there is a need to provide support to all sports. Although it is the high-profile sports, such as Gaelic games, soccer and rugby that we hear of most often, we cannot forget or neglect the others.

The health and well-being benefits of participating in sport and physical activity are so well documented as to be an absolute no-brainer by now. Physical activity improves our life chances, increases our enjoyment of life, makes us look and feel better in mind and body and generally makes it more likely that we will make positive choices in other aspects of our lives. So, how many of us are actually becoming more active? Mar sin de, cá mhéad againn atá ag éirí níos gníomhaí? Evidence from recent surveys shows that while there are still groups in society that participate less than average, overall, there has been a rise in sport participation. However, there is still the gender differentiation, whereby 34% of males record 2·5 active hours weekly, which is almost double that of females. Team sport has declined, although there has been an increase in individual physical activity.

As the motion that we are addressing today states, one of the targets in the Sport Matters strategy is to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities by 2014 that will support player and athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports. The most recent progress report coming from the Sport Matters implementation group tells us that that target has been achieved, which is great news. I have also heard that a new programme will be launched over the next year, which will seek to build on those achievements, as there is still more to be done. It is good to hear that.

We also welcome the fact that, over the next few years, we will have three top-class sporting stadia in Belfast to cater for the needs of the three main sports. Those facilities will also serve other needs and will not just be limited to sport. Cuirimid fáilte roimh an scéala go mbeidh trí staidiamaí den scoth againn sna cúpla bliain atá amach romhainn a bheas ar fáil do na trí spórt mhóra. We also need to be aware that, despite that, there is still a shortfall overall in the provision of sporting facilities. Over one third of the population here live more than 20 miles from a recognised high-quality facility, so there is still more to be done. Tá níos mó le déanamh go fóill.

Therefore, although we celebrate the three big sports, we need to encourage participation in all sports. People should be free to choose whichever sport they wish to take part in, and, as far as possible, we should seek to provide the facilities to do that.

We call on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to continue the great work that she has been doing in supporting our local sports and athletes. We wish to see continuous support and encouragement from other Departments and local councils in investing in facilities for sport, to allow us to look ahead to future competitions to ensure that Irish athletes are able to compete on a level playing pitch with others throughout the world. Tacaím leis an rún. I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I am extremely pleased to speak on this motion, although I am not a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure. It may not look like it, but I was, and am, a very keen sportsman, although I challenge anyone to be a better armchair sportsman than me now, as that is all that I am left with. As is usual with these debates, the main points have been covered, therefore, I will go into slightly different matters, which, I think, relate. The motion calls on the Minister to consider:

> *"prioritising funding towards grass-root sports and elite facilities from within her existing budget".*

In line with the motion, we must do so in a way that our sports people are not disadvantaged in the future.

Sport Matters: the Northern Ireland strategy for sport and physical recreation, 2009-19, sets out the investment and increased investment in sport. However, the strategy also states that it is to be:

> *"in areas such as education, health, the economy and the development of communities".*

That is the area I want to explore. I am sure the Minister will clarify in her answers to others on how successful the spend so far has been. I fully support that angle of the motion but I want to concentrate on that old chestnut of joined-up government. We all call for it but very rarely do we see anything happening. Yet here we have a Department with a small budget, which makes joined-up government even more important. Money is probably wasted by duplication of resources or inefficiencies — not so much in this Department but in other Departments.

If, for example, you look at education and think of the schools, sports fields, the PE and everything that goes on with the health of our children, a lot of money is being spent there that could, maybe, be spent in just a slightly different way to help us in what we are talking about. We also want to see those facilities opened up to all out of hours. The Department for Employment and Learning has the same issue with universities, colleges and skills and training facilities. We need to see those opened up to everybody else.

There is the Department of Health and its policies, and we have already heard about the push for walking and exercise. There is also the Northern Ireland physical activity strategy. The Department for Social Development is spending money on parks, playparks and community groups. Again, I am sure there is a certain amount of overlap there.

It amused me when I was thinking of other Departments and their spends. Of course, our Minister at the Department for Regional Development is encouraging everyone to undertake active travel and bicycle, walk or even run to work. It may take me a while from Templepatrick. However, if we think of Martyn Irvine, maybe we should all be racing here on our bicycles. It is really a matter of using every facility that is here in front of us.

We know that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has £118 million, which has yet to be spent. There is a lot of money in all Departments and maybe we could be making better use of that. I ask the Minister to push for a spearheading from her Department or one that works from OFMDFM.

One matter that always seems to be let out is not so much about getting fit but is absolutely key to incentivising people to do better, and it is the need to have our own sports museum so that we can look at the great successes of people such as Mary Peters or, more recently, Martyn Irvine. A sports museum would lift everybody and mark how successful we have been in the Olympics and many other events.

If we look at the Belfast Agreement, we will see the need for consensus. I would hope that we can see all Departments working together to use that consensus to make sure that we do find a way forward so that we are not duplicating the money that we are spending.

I also want to touch on all the rules, whether security or health and safety rules, or insurance. All those matters stop people from being able to take part in sports or make the most of the facilities around them. I ask the Minister certainly to look into the issue of insurance. Once, when trying to get permission to borrow a little bit of land in Parkgate to put up one set of football posts, we were stymied by the insurance.

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

Mr Kinahan: That is the absolute basics to it all. So, I very much support the motion and I hope that we achieve what it intends.

Mrs McKevitt: I support the motion, which calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to prioritise funding and ensure that the Sport Matters strategy target to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities available by 2014 is achieved. That target, better known as the PL23, is just one of 26 targets set out in the strategy for sport and physical recreation, 2009-19. However, it is a key target, because without facilities little else can be achieved.

4.45 pm

The themed strategy, which focuses on participation, performance and places, is a detailed document that not only focuses on the cost of providing facilities but gives an oversight to the benefits of getting involved in sport and physical activity. The consultation for the strategy had a huge response from the sports organisations and welfare and medical groups, all of which articulated the health benefits and savings to running our Health Department.

In today's world, people are less active than in the past, and spend more time watching television or playing on computers. Our society appears to discourage active lifestyles, such as walking to school or the shops, and a decreasing amount of children's time in school is spent being active. When you do not have the facilities, particularly in rural areas, it is very hard. Therefore, I was pleased to learn today that my local area is to benefit from a new facility in Ballyholland, with an investment of more than £800,000 by the Southern Organisation for Action in Rural areas (SOAR), Newry and Mourne District Council and the community. Investments like that open up doors and dreams for everyone.

Sport adds to a wide range of social, economic and cultural needs. It improves our health and well-being and gives us opportunities in a fast moving world to come together, celebrate and enjoy shared experiences. I should say that, since the new year, I have taken to the treadmill myself. Although, as you might observe, I am not completely match fit yet, I do feel a tremendous benefit. The experience has shown me that physical activity is good for everyone, but, more importantly, should be available for everyone.

As I argued in the spring Supplementary Estimates debate, and will continue to argue, the Department is worthy of a bigger share of our overall Budget. We must work with what we have got at the moment; hence the need for the Minister to prioritise funding towards grass-roots sports and elite facilities. We have seen great achievements from our elite athletes, at the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, on golf courses around the world, on sports fields, on ice and on the sea. The World Police and Fire Games will give us another opportunity to showcase our ability to stage major sporting events. However, our legacy must be built on those successes and support athletes' development in Olympic and Paralympic sports. The £81 million capital funding shortfall identified by Sport NI must be addressed. The momentum built from recent successes should not be lost.

Ms Lo: I support the motion, but would like to express my disappointment at the Alliance Party amendment not having been selected. I recall the debate, in November last year, on the legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It was said then, and I say again now, that we must ensure that there is a genuine lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympics and that the opportunities for all people in sport and physical recreation become more widely available. I had hoped to see the motion further extended to include an emphasis on shared facilities. The Sport Matters strategy has a target of creating or upgrading 10 facilities by 2014, as the Committee Chair mentioned earlier. I ask the Minister to ensure that any new facilities are delivered on a shared basis. Our draft amendment called on the Minister to conduct an audit of sports facilities to identify ways of increasing sharing across the whole community. I urge the Minister to consider doing that. We need to know what facilities in what areas are being underused and how best to share facilities for everyone. I wholeheartedly agree that our sportspeople should not be disadvantaged by lack of investment, but nor should lack of access be an obstacle. We often talk about a shared future. Unfortunately, those discussions are frequently academic and lack a degree of practicality. We know that physical exercise has health benefits. Like the Member who has just spoken, I have taken up physical exercise; I took up swimming, recently. It has benefited me greatly and has helped my recurring neck problem. Sport also has the power to break down barriers in society and to bring people together. It is a practical tool for fostering good community relations, and that must never be underestimated.

After the sporting successes last summer, when our athletes brought us enormous pride, many commented that participation in sport would increase. I was interested, but not surprised, to read the Scottish study that said that that effect would be achieved only if there was a high level of community engagement in legacy planning.

Given the wider health and social benefits of physical exercise, particularly with regard to obesity-related illnesses, I am interested to know how much discussion the Minister has had with the Health Minister on joint investment for grass-roots sport. Of course, the responsibility does not lie only with DCAL and DHSSPS; district councils are also significant investors, as previously mentioned.

The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure's inquiry into participation in sport highlighted the role that local councils have in developing grass-roots sports, particularly with regard to facilities. Given the unmet demand in sports halls across council areas, upgrading venues, so that a variety of sports teams can utilise them, is not only economically sound, but has the added benefit of ensuring that they are available to more people.

Before I close, I add a note of thanks to those who have worked so hard to build community relations through sport. Two weeks ago, the Crusaders/Cliftonville match was postponed amidst an unnotified protest. That disruption was unacceptable. I am aware that measures had been taken to make the sporting event a safe, inclusive and successful football match, and plans included a cross-community walk to the football ground. Sadly, given the events that followed, that work was overshadowed. We should all do better to find ways of expressing our gratitude and support —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Lo: — to those who endeavour to use sport as a means of bridging divides. I take this opportunity to thank them.

Mr Hilditch: I rise in support of this afternoon's motion. Given my background in sport and some of the work that I have undertaken, I believe that the motion is well balanced in that it allows for the upgrade and refurbishment of existing facilities, together with the desire to provide much sought after new complexes. I acknowledge the Minister's dilemma, with one of the smallest departmental budgets set against the target, and the sizeable task ahead.

The debating of the motion today is timely, because, as anyone who follows the sports media will have seen, a large number of sports awards ceremonies have taken place across the Province within the past month. In recent days, I have noted some in Fermanagh, right through to my constituency of East Antrim. I mention that to, again, pay tribute to the many people who have contributed to sport and keeping clubs going through some of the toughest times in our country. Sometimes, they do it with the poorest of facilities and, sometimes, with nothing.

Our elite sportsmen and sportswomen deservedly take the limelight, but, down the pyramid to grass-roots level, there are not only the athletes, but the administrators, coaches and volunteers who give of their time freely and, in some cases, provide finance to ensure that their sport or club survives. Those people play a massive role in bringing people together through sport. Generation after generation, they did so when others were intent on driving communities apart. What better reward for those unsung heroes than, perhaps, to see the beginnings of a proper investment strategy that is aimed at developing facilities. Of course, I am aware that some sections of certain sports have benefited from previous opportunities on funding, but, as I have alluded to in the House before, we are in danger of creating the haves and the have-nots of sport. That is why a way forward must be balanced and reach as many people as possible in our communities.

An example of the position that some clubs and sports groups find themselves in was evidenced to me on Saturday past, when I was at one of our designated stadiums. It was a bitterly cold winter's afternoon, but the hot water system collapsed for the umpteenth time. It involved the boiler, pumps, valves, showers and radiators.

That club, which has just laid a new pitch at its own expense to improve its facilities, must try to find additional cash to replace a water system that has been repaired many times before: a sticking-plaster job. Does it do another sticking-plaster job on top of one that has been done before, or does it invest in a new system in a building that will, probably, become uninhabitable or even condemned shortly? That closure would affect the entire community because the club is heavily involved in work to tackle social deprivation in the area. That is why there must be a robust assessment of need as part of the strategy.

Finally, I commend the research documents that were compiled for the debate. It is especially interesting to

look at examples of work in other places. In particular, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to the Scottish model. I ask her to consider that model, which created a series of community sports hubs as the country moves towards hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2014. I believe that that flexible model would be best suited to a small country like ours. It would be very much community based, with shared facilities, and would reach out to elite and grass-roots sports alike. That model would lend itself particularly well to partnership working as well as bringing perhaps two, three or four sports together in one facility. It would open up better use of facilities that are owned or managed largely by clubs themselves, schools or local councils and provide up-to-date, high-standard changing accommodation, training areas, club rooms, etc. Integrated and programme-led facilities would bring much buy-in from every sector.

I support the motion and look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé breá sásta labhairt i bhfabhar an rúin. I am very pleased to speak in favour of the motion.

Like others, I have a long association with sports clubs, particularly in an administrative rather than active role of late. First and foremost, I pay tribute to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who, with the smallest departmental budget, has shown absolute and unfaltering support and assistance to all sports and their development. That has been evident and recognised in the debate.

When the draft motion came to the Committee, there was, I think, reference to "elite sports" and "minority sports". I am not keen on either of those two terms because I do not think they are fair. The terminology should perhaps be "mainstream sports" and "grass-roots sports" or, indeed, "other sports". As we know, mainstream sports account for some 93% of all spectator sports in this area. They are often referred to as the "big three". However, the reality on the ground is that the big three are made up of many clubs that, day and daily, struggle to survive after they have paid all of their outgoings.

Back in November, there was a discussion about the legacy of the Olympic Games. It is certainly welcome that the new 50-metre pool is to open in Bangor next month. I understand that the Committee will visit it just a few days before it opens. I very much look forward to that visit. The pool is part of the physical infrastructure and legacy of the games. More importantly, perhaps, is the Minister's recent announcement of boxing funding of £3·2 million. Again, I congratulate her for coming forward with that. I know that it has made a great difference to a number of small boxing clubs. I speak from experience. One of my local boxing clubs has been able to produce some of the best and greatest champions that this part of world has produced, including Eamonn O'Kane, who captained the Commonwealth team in Delhi in 2010.

The Minister has also been very much to the fore in recognising some of the minor sports, such as kick-boxing. That, too, is to be welcomed. Our consultation in November certainly threw up some interesting statistics in respect of the problems that clubs might have, such as funding and the provision of development officers, training facilities and equipment. I think of a local archery club near me. To kit yourself out with a bow and all the rest of it costs somewhere in the region of £2,000, a not inconsiderable sum in the current climate.

5.00 pm

Travel and insurance are also major costs for a lot of smaller clubs. There are issues of regulation and legislation. As the Chair said, there is a lack of visibility and sponsorship. Ms Lo said — and this may be critical to any new delivery of sport facilities — that all sport facilities should now be multi-sports facilities. That should be taken into account at design stage. That has been done very much in the development of the new Casement, Windsor and Ravenhill stadia. There must be total buy-in at local government level to provide that. There has not been in the past. We should certainly encourage it, and I hope that the Minister will do so.

The Sport Matters strategy 2009-2019 contains very interesting statistics on the various statuses of the targets: six have already been achieved, 16 are on track for achievement, and four are on track with some delay. None is at risk. I welcome that very much.

I call on the Minister to continue her sterling work to date. Tacaím leis an rún.

Mr Humphrey: I support the motion. Those of us who have an interest in sport will realise and accept that sport has united the people of Northern Ireland during the worst of the Troubles. Other Members have made mention of the 22 sports representatives who came to the stakeholder event in November. During that event, I spoke to a number of people from minority sports who had mixed views on whether the legacy from the Olympics and Paralympics last year in London would have a benefit for their sport in Northern Ireland. The sports that were represented at the games felt that there would be a positive. However, for sport in general, the Olympics and Paralympics — those great events that lifted this nation — will be of significant benefit to all sport, not just the sports that took part in them.

One example is when England successfully won the Ashes a number of years ago and took them from Australia before retaining them. Andrew Flintoff England cricket shirts outsold David Beckham's England shirts in sports shops across the United Kingdom. That was an example of a minority sport eclipsing a majority sport, and probably the nation's national sport. The people who were here from the minority sports felt that a lack of finance, funding and investment was a serious issue. One of them commented to me that small and moderate amounts of money can actually make a difference to sports. One example is a sport in which I have an involvement: cricket.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member and I share a common issue in relation to cricket clubs, particularly with the Member's club of Woodvale Cricket Club. In my constituency, North Down Cricket Club has a particular issue with fencing around its facility. The Minister has been made aware of that. A very small amount of money could make a huge difference for the sustainability of both those clubs, which reside in residential areas. Like the Member, I hope for a positive response from the Minister on those issues.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I agree entirely. I declare an interest as a member of Woodvale Cricket Club. An investment to provide nets, which would prevent the ball visiting gardens and back windows of houses close by, would be of great advantage.

Another example of a minority sport that would benefit from some investment from regional government and local councils is, of course, boxing. I have met representatives from Albert Foundry, Cairn Lodge and Midland boxing clubs in my constituency. I know that Belfast City Council — I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council — will have a boxing strategy. I know that the Minister has a boxing strategy. It is absolutely important, if not vital, that those strategies coalesce to ensure that there is no wastage and maximise the benefit to those sports.

We must be fair, though, to government, in terms of both direct rule Ministers and regional Administrations at Stormont. Very clearly, for a long time in this country, money had to be put into providing security and defending our streets from anarchy. Money could not go into sport facilities. We need to bear that in mind. Many sporting bodies really want to see a joined-up approach, and I think that the Assembly needs to work closely with them on that. I believe that, by working with schools, universities, education and library boards, councils and private clubs, we can deliver that joined-up approach.

I want to use the example of Windsor Park, the national stadium for the Northern Ireland football team. Investment there means that there will be a new stadium and a home for the Irish Football Association (IFA), Linfield Football Club and the IFA's museum. If there was to be a joining up and meshing of Belfast City Council's facilities in the area there would be a new leisure centre, swimming pool, 3G pitches and, of course, that would also bring in Boucher Road Playing Fields. Apart from those facilities it would also open a type of Wembley Way — or Windsor Way — on Boucher Road. There would also be a centre of excellence for football with shared costs for the council and government.

Budgetary constraints in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), a small Department with a relatively modest budget, mean that a joined-up approach to our provision of sports facilities is vital. The national Government, local councils, education and library boards, universities, private clubs and funders like the National Lottery all need to work together. If we are to maximise facilities, increase participation and recognition for sports, and improve the health of our young people and the wider community, it is absolutely essential that we produce elite athletes as well as well-meaning participants in activities. A collaborative approach, and only a collaborative approach, will enable us to get to the point where we can deliver.

Realistically, we will only have the 10 proposed elite facilities we are looking for across the sports in Northern Ireland if we have a joined-up approach, with local councils working with national and regional government. If there is to be a governmental shake-up, DCAL may no longer exist. It cannot be expected to provide the funding for this. We have to be realistic with our approach to the provision of sporting facilities as we move forward.

For too long, the facilities for our spectators, even of the big three that people talk about, have not been as good as they should be.

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

Mr Humphrey: We are now approaching those three sports having world-class facilities. I look forward to a newly enhanced Windsor Park for the green and white army.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I support the motion.

The motion refers to grass-roots and elite sports facilities, but it is important to remember that such facilities are part of a continuum and that they should feed into each other. The athletes who end up using elite facilities begin their careers at a grass-roots level, and the better the facilities at that level, the better the chance we have of producing athletes at an elite level. Likewise, the success of our elite athletes encourages more people to participate at a grass-roots level and encourages our young athletes to reach for the sky. Elite facilities are essential for our sportspeople who compete at the higher levels.

We have heard today about the benefits of sport, and they are well known. Interest and participation in sport are good for physical and mental health and general well-being. The community aspect of sport also supports social cohesion and focuses people of all ages in a community on something that is of common interest across the age groups. Increasing participation in sports involves investment on the capital and revenue sides.

At a grass-roots level, strengthening club structures is an important aspect of increasing participation. Good club organisation and structures lead to improved funding, higher levels of volunteerism, better coaching and modern facilities. All these together attract more members. Professional backup from a governing body in the form of full-time officers supports the development of the club. Sport NI's Clubmark and the GAA's Club Maith give direction, support and backup.

Volunteer coaches have a very important role to play at club level at all age groups, from the youngest upwards. I thank all those who volunteer in sport as coaches, administrators and in other roles. The Active Communities programme, which funds some 120 coaches on the ground based on the 11-council model, is a five-year programme that is funded by the National Lottery. Schemes such as Active Communities are good for grass-roots sport. They get to the athletes on the ground and help and support their participation, training and skill development.

Earlier, the Chair spoke about the stakeholder event in the Long Gallery. She outlined the issues that came out of that, and I will not dwell on those. However, as other Members have said, DCAL does not have the resources to achieve everything that we want to through sport, including the facilities. We have some evidence of joined-up government around sport. We obviously have contributions from the lead Department — the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure — from the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the Health Department. The Department of Education contributes a large amount, and I want to refer to its huge sporting estate. Mr McNarry

attempted to deal with that issue through his private Member's Community Use of Schools Bill. Unfortunately, the Bill did not advance beyond its Second Stage, but the Department gave an undertaking that this issue would be dealt with. That does not seem to have been the case, to this point anyway.

There are good examples of local government and the Department of Education co-operating, as in the facilities at St Colman's College in Newry and St Patrick's High School in Keady, to name but a couple. The facilities there are used by pupils during the day and they are open to the community in the evening. That type of joined-up co-operation is, I think, part of the way forward. Sport is a universal language across nations. I believe that it should be a universal language across —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr D Bradley: — all Departments here. I would like to see a dialogue opening up where greater funding is made available to the —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr D Bradley: — Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide the type of facilities that we need and are outlined in the motion.

Mr Allister: In part, this motion looks forward to future Olympics. Of course, we do that from the perspective of a very successful 2012 Olympics in and for the United Kingdom, for which I hope that we are all grateful.

Looking forward to future Olympics brings to mind, though, an issue that the House addressed over three months ago, on 12 November. That was the difficulty that many athletes and citizens of Northern Ireland find in respect of their inability to compete on behalf of the nation to which they belong and wish to belong; namely, the United Kingdom.

On the specific issue of the sport of boxing, the House passed a resolution calling for a Northern Ireland federation of boxing to be formed to open up the pathway to participation in our own national team — that of the United Kingdom — in future Olympics, so that boxers from Northern Ireland could have that option. Has the Minister taken any steps to advance that cause? Indeed, has the Committee taken any steps to advance that cause? Or is it something that it is hoped will simply be forgotten? Perhaps we could hear something on that.

We had, of course, the funding situation for boxing. However, the discriminatory distribution thereof by the Minister, who, although she was all over the place with her answers, seemed, for obvious reasons, to insist that it came down to this: if you were not an affiliate of the all-Ireland Irish Amateur Boxing Association, you were excluded from funding. That was a deliberate and calculated —

5.15 pm

Mr McMullan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Are we wandering off the motion here when we use words like "discriminatory", which was in that last statement by the Member for North Antrim? Is he way off the wall altogether, and will he stay on the motion?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member may not be way off the wall, but he is certainly getting there, and I encourage him to return to the motion.

Mr Allister: I am sure, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you are very grateful to the Member for East Antrim for wanting to help you to do your job, but I am sure that you are more than capable of doing the job yourself.

The point is very relevant when one is talking about "funding towards grass-root sports". Boxing is a grass-root sport. The motion addresses "funding towards grass-root sports", so it is wholly pertinent to ask where the funding is going and why. Of course, in the context of the suggestion that there has been discrimination in the distribution of that funding by the imposition of a knowingly politically sensitive hurdle for boxing clubs —

Mr McMullan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is getting ridiculous. The Member is using this debate as a political platform to push his agenda on boxing. He had his opportunity to discuss that here in a previous debate. He is still using the words "discrimination" and "knowingly". That has nothing whatsoever to do with the motion before us.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I caution the Member that he is coming dangerously close to questioning the Chair. I believe that I am quite capable of doing the job. Again, I encourage Members to stay to the motion. The motion is about funding.

Mr Allister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, but if we did want to talk about discrimination in sport, which would be germane to the motion, we could of course point out that, since the Minister came to office, she has appointed to Sport NI 10 individuals from a Catholic background and four from a Protestant background. We could point out that, although she has had 71 applications from those from a Catholic background and 70 applications from those from a Protestant background for ministerial appointments —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Allister: If you are Catholic, you have twice the chance —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Allister: — of being appointed under this Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Member will resume his seat. The Member is now totally out of order. I ask the Member, in the last few seconds available to him, to conclude and speak to the motion.

Mr Allister: I trust that, in sport, we will see the Minister leave her bigotry and her inclinations in that regard to one side —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is now up.

Mr Allister: — and deal with sport as it ought to be dealt with.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Choiste as an seans an rún seo a phlé. I thank the members of the Committee for tabling the motion. I believe that everyone who has spoken — bar the Member who spoke last — has done so in the spirit of the motion and made very relevant points.

From the outset, as we are on the subject of athletes from here competing in major international tournaments, I would like to take this opportunity again to congratulate Marty Irvine, who won gold and silver medals last week at the World Track Championships in Belarus.

I will also take the opportunity to recognise the Alpine skiers Ryan Hill, Rosalind Connolly and Lucy Best, who between them won one gold, two silver and two bronze medals at the Special Olympics World Winter Games in South Korea, and whom I had the pleasure of meeting last week at an event organised by Special Olympics Ireland. I also congratulate Kelly Gallagher, a partially sighted athlete, on winning bronze and silver medals at the IPC Alpine Skiing World Championships in Spain on 20 and 21 February. As David Hilditch pointed out, it seems that, on most days, we are hearing about sport in a positive way through celebrations but, certainly, through people's achievements.

I listened very carefully to today's debate and noted all of the Members' comments and some of their arguments. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure's motion relates directly to one of the targets under the places pillar of my strategy for sport and physical recreation, PL 23. As Karen McKevitt pointed out, that seeks to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities by 2014 that will support players and athletes in the development of Olympic and Paralympic sports.

At the start of the debate, the Chairperson of the Committee talked about the genuine and lasting legacy of the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. Several Members mentioned a stakeholder event that took place in September 2012. That event looked in particular at a focused review of the Sports Matters strategy, as well as at gaps in funding and elite sports, and at training funding for sports.

Sometimes it comes down to having to make choices between competing or travelling. It also sometimes comes down to not being able, for example, to attract events because of the condition of some of our facilities. I know that other Members, not just those who sit on the Committee, such as Danny Kinahan, also mentioned that.

I think that, for us, boxing is a contradiction. It has some of the worst sports facilities, yet it produces more medals across the board. However, that does not mean to say that the situation is good enough. It is far from good enough, and we need to look at some of the smaller sports' capital and revenue needs, because, as mentioned, a small investment can go a long way.

There was a hint at looking at having a velodrome after Marty Irvine's success. I will raise that with my counterpart Michael Ring when I meet him soon. We may need to look at a multiple sports facility that athletes across the island can use. The idea of having a velodrome in County Down or elsewhere was tested previously, but the business case did not stand up. Perhaps we can do something that will mean that athletes will have to travel by car or bus for only a couple of hours rather than having to get on a plane, which, again, is an added expense.

We do need to look at high-performance facilities, particularly for elite athletes. We also need to look at coaching and mentoring, and at the lack of visibility. We need to look at the visibility and recognition of volunteers, coaches and administrators, which many Members mentioned.

Rosie McCorley said that success begets success. That is very clear. However, it is not just about what we see in the Olympics on television. Indeed, this afternoon, our first item of business was about Marty. It is about greater participation and encouraging physical activity, as well as yielding success in sport. It is about making sure that we make the best use of our facilities.

I am not too far from you, Danny. If I am not watching sport by invitation, I watch a lot of it on television or listen to it on the radio. I understand and appreciate the power of sport for health and the economy, as well as from the point of view of education, safety and health and well-being across the board. There are many overlaps, but I am pleased to say that, in my short time in the Department, I have seen that some of the gaps between Departments have been plugged.

I believe that sport and health and physical activity are Executive priorities. Different Departments are doing their bit towards trying to achieve better health and well-being. That can only be good. I can see that the sports monitoring group (SMG), which looks after the strategy, has produced better cohesion and collaboration across the board. It looks at local government, Departments, sporting bodies and sporting fora. However, I can also see that happening among my Executive colleagues. For example, there is more joined-up working between my Department and DSD than there was previously, and there is better joined-up work with the Health Department and the Department of Education, which is all to the good.

Karen McKevitt pointed to the positive impact that there has been on getting facilities in her constituency. I appreciate that, despite political differences, other Members have recognised that, although DCAL has the smallest budget, it has looked at investment in diverse ways. We have to be smarter about that investment.

To every Member who raised the point, I give a commitment to do that.

As I said, I made additional money available for the big-three sports to look at nutrition, kids who are excluded and kids who have never been involved in any sport. As Dominic pointed out, we have to invest somewhere in the journey from grass roots to elite. We are not looking at the big-three sports in respect of just the sports that they are involved in. Kids may be athletic or involved in archery or other sports. We hope that the good offices of the IFA, rugby and the GAA will have the sense, skills and expertise to forward kids who are not involved in their sports somewhere else. That is a condition of the funding, and I am happy for that to happen.

I did not see the amendment that you referred to, Anna. I do not mean this in a bad way, but I think that there is a bit of naivety there. There are many more shared facilities than the Member gives the sports credit for. I know that you did not mean that begrudgingly, but there are. One of the best examples was when Linfield invited the Antrim camogs to use Windsor Park because they did not have enough facilities. That was not a cosmetic exercise. The relationship continued well beyond that.

There have been some mighty rows from mighty mouths in this place, such as what we heard from the previous

Member to speak. They would like to make politics out of this. However, these things are happening in a very genuine way, and that will continue.

There is additional money for those sports and other sports. Unfortunately, the Department of Justice did not continue to fund midnight soccer, which was being funded from assets recovery. However, DCAL does fund that, because there are kids who, for all sorts of reasons, do not get an opportunity to be physically active until the evening, particularly those in socially deprived areas that are vulnerable to crime and poor mental health. I appreciate the sentiments, but a lot is being done. Many Members said that there is not enough visibility for some of the good work that goes on behind the scenes.

David Hilditch pointed out that there are huge challenges even with the development of stadia and grounds. Fixing or replacing that boiler could mean the cancellation of some coaching programmes or trips away. I understand that. It is not a good position to be in, but I understand it. I also understand his nervousness about creating an environment in which there is a gap between those who have and those who have not. That is not what any of us is about. I do not think that any of us is about elite anything.

Cathal Ó hOisín made the point that I have just made about the three big sports. He also pointed out the power of talking to people and, in particular, the stakeholder event that happened in September 2012. William Humphrey talked about his own constituency and took an intervention on cricket from the Committee Chair. It is true that a small investment goes a long way. In that case, it sounds as though good fences will make good neighbours. Such investment means having a relationship with the people who live around you, so it is important to have a look at that.

I met boxers from Cairn Lodge and other clubs on Friday night in Dublin. Despite the ongoing accusations, the boxing fraternity enjoys a lot of support. That is why it got the money that it did. The conditions for some clubs were atrocious. I refute the allegation of discrimination that the Member for North Antrim has made against me on an ongoing basis. I am not challenging the Chair — I just want that read into the record. I think that it is really unfair. I take my section 75 duty very seriously. I implement all my resources in accordance with section 75.

As regards the accusation that the Member keeps repeating, as I have said to him before, he needs to put up or shut up. He is not doing a good service to the boxing family. Sandy Row boxing club, like any other club, can apply for funding as long as it is affiliated. That has not changed since I last spoke. Despite the Member's protests, I have still not received a request from him to try to get this sorted out. I assume that he is just being a complete diva and using this opportunity to raise an issue that, in reality, he has done nothing about.

I welcome —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will not. I have heard enough from you.

I welcome the motion. The Committee has done a lot to support grass-roots and elite facilities. I welcome the debate. I will take on board what Members have said and the suggestions to look at the research paper and the Scottish model. During the debate, Members have voiced support for all volunteers, coaches, administrators, governing bodies, and athletes and their families. It has also, yet again, raised the whole area of sport in a very positive way. I support the motion.

5.30 pm

Mr Irwin (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank all Members who have spoken in the debate. The motion is about an important issue, and I am glad that Members have involved themselves. As the Committee Chairperson highlighted so clearly at the start of the debate, the Committee is keen that the achievements of London 2012 — the Olympic and Paralympic Games — provide a lasting legacy for all our sportspeople. The Committee has looked at that issue since the end of the games and has involved a range of sports in its discussions on how to cement that legacy.

We are all delighted that sportspeople from Northern Ireland did so well in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is also worth noting that our successes were not in the sports that receive the lion's share of the funding here, namely football, GAA and rugby. They were in other sports, such as rowing and boxing. In my own constituency, a young man called Ryan Hill recently competed in the Special Olympics Winter Games in South Korea and returned to Northern Ireland with two silver medals. That is on top of five other medals that he has received in recent times.

As Members have heard, the Committee has worked closely with sports other than the big three to see how they can benefit from the legacy of the games and what they may need to do to ensure that participants might one day find themselves competing in the Olympics or Paralympics. The Committee Chair outlined that the Minister has put in place additional funding for football, GAA and rugby. However, the Committee's motion is designed to focus the minds of the Minister and Members on what we need to do for other sports. Those sports might not appear on our TVs so often, and they may not attract the numbers of supporters that the big three enjoy. However, given a little bit of investment, it is likely that they could significantly raise their profile and make a tremendous contribution to our community and to the lives of participants.

The Chairperson referred to the Sport Matters strategy and its targets. The Committee learned in the past couple of weeks that the targets for the upgrading of venues have been achieved, but we are aware that, in some cases, plans have been approved but not actioned. Members will be aware of countless sporting clubs in their constituencies that suffer from poor or inadequate equipment and facilities. In many cases, those clubs would see real benefits from an investment of even a few thousand pounds.

With today's motion, the Committee wants to encourage the Minister to spread the funding a bit more across a greater number of sports. We are not saying that she should not continue to support the big three. However, they have access to commercial funding that smaller grass-roots sports do not. Talented participants in other sports may not be able to fulfil their potential without the proper environment and competitive training. It is important that we assess their needs and that the Minister is creative with the funding that is available. As the Chairperson has said,

the Committee encourages the Minister to make additional bids for funding in monitoring rounds.

The Committee Chairperson mentioned the World Police and Fire Games, which take place this August and are being hosted in Belfast. Those games represent a significant profile boost for Northern Ireland. The Committee is keen that we make sure that we are well placed to bid for other games. That will not happen unless we can show that we have the appropriate facilities. The beauty of the World Police and Fire Games is that many of the events do not require elaborate venues or stadia, but that is generally not the case for other events.

As the Chairperson has stressed, the Committee is extremely mindful of the pressures on the Minister's budget. However, we call for smaller sports not to be overlooked when the Minister is considering her investment plans. The Chairperson highlighted that a number of sports have indicated the need for indoor facilities, and the Committee believes that, in some cases, there is an opportunity for facilities to be shared, maximising their utilisation and the benefits they bring. The Minister is more than aware of the benefits that sports bring when it comes to social inclusion and health, and better sports facilities in our communities will encourage more people to participate, with the added benefit of new talent being discovered.

As the Chairperson said, we must expect councils to play their full part. However, there is no reason why the Minister cannot work with councils to bring forward plans to upgrade and enhance the sports facilities that we have. That would be an excellent example of the kind of joined-up government that we are always being asked to undertake.

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on some of the points made by Members who spoke today. Ms McCorley commended our Olympic and Paralympic competitors on their successes, which she believes will inspire ordinary people to participate in future. She also referred to sport's health and well-being elements. Mr Kinahan focused on the benefits of sports for communities and health and well-being, and he called for joined-up government to make funding go further.

Mrs McKevitt highlighted the necessity of having good facilities. Again, she reflected on the health and well-being aspect of sports. Anna Lo called for shared facilities and commented that sport can break down barriers and bring people together. David Hilditch acknowledged the small DCAL budget and the difficulties that that had caused. He praised the volunteers at grass-roots level.

Mr Bradley reiterated the importance of sport for health and well-being and spoke about how it brings people together. Mr Ó hOisín commented on the Minister's work on sport and talked about issues around terminology. He welcomed the 50-metre pool at Bangor. William Humphrey spoke about the lack of investment being an issue and said that small amounts of money can make a big difference.

Jim Allister highlighted the achievements of the London Olympics. He also highlighted the issue of sports participants not being able to compete for the UK and questioned what the Committee had done in relation to that. The Committee has met the boxing federation, the Minister and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association on the issue.

I thank all those who made such useful contributions to the debate and encourage them to support the motion. I support the motion and commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the target in the Sport Matters strategy to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities by 2014 that will support player and athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to consider prioritising funding towards grass-root sports and elite facilities from within her existing budget, to ensure that our sportspeople competing in future Olympic and Commonwealth Games are not disadvantaged as a result of lack of investment.

Private Members' Business

Agrifood: Graduate Programmes

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Buchanan: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the importance of the agrifood sector to the Northern Ireland economy; believes that this sector has the potential for significant growth in the future; recognises the need for graduates in this area and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote graduate programmes in this sector, particularly within our two universities.*

I am glad to see that the Minister is here to listen to this very important debate. This issue cuts across the remit of several Departments and agencies, but our primary focus today is on the role of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) — I am the Deputy Chairperson of that Committee — and that of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) — I am also a member of that Committee.

On 18 February, we had an important debate in the House on sustainable energy. In his speech, my colleague Mr Stephen Moutray emphasised the importance of creating high-value-added jobs in that sector. His line of argument was that we need to have people who are suitably educated and skilled so that the expanding sustainable energy sector can be a growth area for business.

The same logic underpins the motion before us this evening. Agriculture is one of the oldest industries and is still one of our main industries. Northern Ireland is more economically dependent on agriculture than any other region of the UK. Like all other businesses, the agriculture industry has had its good times and its bad times, and, like all other businesses, it has to adapt to changing circumstances or it will fall into sharp decline.

Food and drink is Ulster's largest industry and employs almost 30% of our total manufacturing workforce. Figures released last December show that it is worth almost £4 billion to our economy. Taken together, the agriculture and the food and drink industries account for a very significant share of our GDP and are, therefore, key economic drivers.

The agrifood sector is of great importance to the UK economy and even more so to the Northern Ireland economy. It is the largest contributor to sales, external sales and employment in our manufacturing sector. It is recognised in our economic strategy as one of our priority sectors, and, in that strategy, there is a commitment to develop the industry.

Let us note as well that our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are often family-run businesses, have been the very backbone of our economy over the years and account for a large percentage of the agrifood sector. The sector, from the farm to the manufacturing plant to the retailer, has tremendous potential. It provides our agriculture industry, our wider manufacturing industries and our local retail sector with wonderful opportunities to develop and expand, and the agrifood industry is one of the keys to our economic recovery.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The current crisis and scandal in the meat industry, which has sent shock waves across the nation and beyond, is already having a major impact on the food industry. This is a pivotal moment in the history of food manufacturing and processing. The drama is still unfolding, and who knows where it will end. They always say that it is an ill wind that blows no good, for the crisis can, in a way, work to the advantage of our local agrifood industry. That has been illustrated in recent weeks by the increase in customer footfall in local butchers' shops. We have a high-quality product and excellent traceability and tracking systems in place, and we now have an opportunity to market our local product with renewed confidence and determination, not only in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and Europe but in markets right across the world and in countries such as China, Brazil, Russia and India.

However, if we are to succeed in the weeks, months and years to come, we must address the broader needs of the agrifood industry in a strategic and forward-looking manner. We need to be ahead of the game in research and development, innovation, and driving and targeting our export strategy. We must be able to adapt to changing customer habits, global demographics and health trends, and, bearing in mind that we still import a large percentage of our food, a fact that has been highlighted by the horse meat scandal, we need to remember that there is scope for us to produce more for the home market. We can act decisively to enhance the profitability of our local food chain.

There are several things that we can do to encourage our agrifood industry to achieve those key goals. The motion recognises not only the importance of the industry but the importance of ensuring its medium- to long-term viability and competitiveness. It identifies a central need and a pool of suitable graduates who will set standards and lead the industry forward at the various levels that I referred to earlier. Much has already been done and is being done to ensure the development of the sector in that way, and we warmly welcome that.

The Agri-Food Strategy Board has a major role to play, and it is pleasing to note that the food and drink manufacturing and processing future skills action group has reached agreement with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and the universities to put specific courses in place over the next three years to fill gaps in the sector. The action group's three-year plan is designed to improve the management and leadership skills of employees in the food and drink sector and includes efforts at increasing awareness of careers in the area by informing schools, teachers and pupils about the range of job opportunities.

5.45 pm

The Minister for Employment and Learning recently announced an increase in the number of students enrolling at our local universities, but let us ensure that, when they emerge as graduates, they do so with the knowledge base and skills to enable them to compete for high value-added

jobs in the marketplace, including the agrifood sector. Invest NI and others must also do everything possible to ensure that these are secure, well-paid and rewarding jobs in that sector. I know that courses in STEM subjects and related subjects such as food quality, safety and nutrition are oversubscribed at our universities and at CAFRE. In a way, this is a good problem to have, and every effort must be made by the universities and the college to develop their curricula in this area to focus on the provision of the right courses and, very importantly, to liaise closely with the industry to ensure that its requirements are met.

Earlier, I mentioned the good work of the skills action group. I also urge the Minister for Employment and Learning to work closely with the universities on all these issues, and I urge the Agriculture Minister to work closely with CAFRE. The Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association stated that there are important skills gaps to be tackled. Areas where there are such gaps include marketing and senior management skills and the need for greater knowledge and understanding of animal nutrition. I have no doubt that other Members will draw attention to other gaps and other areas where there are weaknesses.

The debate has come at the right time. The agrifood industry faces many challenges, but it also faces many opportunities. Let us be sure to meet the challenge and to grasp the opportunities. One way to do that is to ensure a good supply of graduates who will lead the way. I urge the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to work closely on these issues. Let us not be found wanting when it comes to these matters but let us ensure that all that can be done is being done to provide graduate programmes in the sector, particularly in our two universities, so that we have the graduates who are needed and that we have the qualifications that will bridge the gap and which will fill the demand in the sectors. We will still be at the cutting edge and leading for Northern Ireland. I urge the House to give its full support to the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the motion. As was outlined by the previous Member who spoke, the local agrifood industry has demonstrated in recent years that it remains one of the more resilient sectors in our local economy. Indeed, it is recording growth at a time when many other sectors are experiencing great difficulty. Without doubt, one of the great drivers of growth and vitality in any sector is increased innovation and skills, and this has been the case with our local agrifood sector. However, we must not grow idle in the shade of recent success in this regard. As outlined by many commentators, including the industry itself, we need to constantly invest in the skills base in the agrifood sector.

With this in mind, the recent announcement by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of a food innovation centre at Loughry is to be greatly welcomed as a huge step in the right direction. In light of the central role of the agrifood sector to our local economy, I doubt whether £1·8 million of government money has been better spent in the lifetime of this Assembly. Hopefully to be finished in the next two years, the food innovation centre will come as a major addition to the existing facilities at Loughry, bringing with it significant advancements in product development, package design and quality control laboratories. Not only will it provide much-needed jobs during the construction phase but it will meet the growing employment demands of the agrifood sector for decades to come by providing established and start-up companies with the technical staff needed to grow their business. In tandem with CAFRE's existing reputation for excellence, the new food innovation centre will, no doubt, act as a hub for future innovation and will help to facilitate new technologies and the successful exploitation of emerging market opportunities.

In welcoming the innovation centre at Loughry, it is perhaps salient to acknowledge the role of CAFRE in general in sustaining the recent growth in our agrifood sector. With campuses at Loughry, Greenmount and Enniskillen, CAFRE continues to grow and has, in fact, risen by some 20% in the past number of years, with more than 1,600 students enrolled in courses currently. Central to DARD's development of skills in the agrifood sector, CAFRE has a business-development focus, with its education and training targeted to those who seek to work in the local industry. A huge attribute of the existing arrangements is the provision of industry-led training, with alterations to course content made only following consultation with the advisory group and industry stakeholders, delivering a wide variety of programmes in agriculture, horticulture, food, equine, and rural enterprise. All CAFRE courses are externally accredited, and graduates are, no doubt, held in high esteem. In fact, last year's figures show that 91% of CAFRE students surveyed six months after they graduated were in employment or continuing their education in postgraduate research. Those are quite remarkable statistics. Furthermore, when you consider that the local figure for youth unemployment is nearly 19%, it is fitting that the House acknowledges the sterling work that CAFRE and DARD are doing, not only in sustaining our local agrifood industry but in driving it forward to capitalise on market opportunities.

In addition to the soaring success of CAFRE, the recent investment in improved innovation and research in the agrifood sector is vital in equipping our local industry with the skills needed to respond successfully to market demand. With tens of millions of pounds spent in recent years through DARD's evidence and innovation strategy, our improved research facilities and expertise now give us an opportunity to access new European research funding that was not possible in years gone by.

To enable local industry to access those funds within the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle O'Neill, recently announced that she would fund a local EU research funding facilitator to support local businesses and researchers in the area of food science. Bearing in mind that DARD's annual spend on agrifood research is close to £10 million, I believe that the new EU-focused post will add greatly to DARD's strategy of upskilling local businesses and will, no doubt, contribute greatly to the development of innovation in the local industry. It is important to bear in mind that skills gaps can have serious, detrimental implications for localised economic growth. So, unless there is a continued determination from all Ministers and Departments concerned to match the positive steps already taken by the Agriculture Minister to address shortages in innovation and science-specific skills, the health of our agrifood industry could be vulnerable in the long term.

Finally, a point worth mentioning is the tangible need for Departments to create and support a regulatory environment that nurtures increased growth in our agrifood industry. One of the main obstacles to creating and expanding businesses in rural communities is planning difficulties, as well as other deficits in infrastructure and services. In my South Down constituency, local industry has been crying out for years for infrastructural improvements, such as the Ballynahinch bypass, not to mention the complete failure of politicians and agencies alike to address gridlock in our county town of Downpatrick.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Hazzard: Such gridlock has come to characterise the ongoing failure to address the lack of investment in the area. Indeed, the 3,500 public sector workers who commute to Belfast daily account for the most commuter miles a year of any district outside the greater Belfast area.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Hazzard: If our local agrifood industry is to continue to expand, and —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Hazzard: — I have no doubt that it will, we must ensure that we facilitate and nurture an environment —

Mr Speaker: The Members time has gone.

Mr Hazzard: Thank you.

Mrs Dobson: As the Ulster Unionist Party's agriculture spokesperson, I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. An issue that I believe will unite all sides of the House is the fact that enrolment at the CAFRE colleges is at an all-time high. That is proof, if we needed it, that more and more people want to learn about farming and take up a career in our agrifood industry. They want to enter an industry that has a massive potential for growth and a bright future. I believe that this is healthy and to be warmly welcomed — unlike some of the food served in the college canteens, of course.

DARD, therefore, has a duty to direct its efforts and resources to that future, a future in which our young farmers take up the reins when their time comes. Entrusting farmers with the right tools to do that will provide a future for our young farmers and their families for generations to come. Once their studies are complete, young farmers and those progressing to further, higher and graduate study, need to have the confidence that there will be a job there for them. Sadly, the recent news of falling farm incomes will not act as a magnet but will, I fear, deflect people from choosing farming as a career in the first place. This is bad news for an industry with massive potential for growth. Departments have a duty to put their collective shoulders to the wheel for the sake of the future success of the Northern Ireland economy. The green shoots of recovery are emerging from the agrifood industry. For the recovery to be sustained and for growth to continue, we need to upskill our workforce to meet the future challenges of the industry. Time and time again, Northern Ireland has been internationally recognised as having an extremely dynamic and adaptable workforce. That workforce has risen to meet the challenges of the past, and I firmly believe that, with the right support from the Executive, it can and will be ready for the challenges of the future.

One area where clear change is needed is the relationship between the recently merged six further and higher education colleges and the CAFRE colleges. The now stronger and resource-rich further education colleges are in a unique position to provide help and support to those who are taking courses in the agrifood industry, not least in literacy and numeracy, which are areas that we have continually debated in the House. There must be massive potential to sweep away duplication of effort at all levels between further education colleges and the CAFRE colleges to lower costs while raising standards and to increase the geographical availability of agrifood-related courses so that they can be offered to a wider audience across Northern Ireland. That will ultimately lead to the delivery of improvements in academic attainment and in the learning experience for all our students. I would welcome the Minister for Employment and Learning's thoughts on the matter and his ideas on how greater working relationships can be fostered between further education colleges and the CAFRE colleges.

In making those comments, however, I am aware that, in reply to a question for written answer from my colleague Sandra Overend, the Minister recognised that skills gaps exist in the agrifood industry. Those include the shortage of food technologists and the need to raise leadership and management skills in the agrifood industry. Although we recognise the establishment of the skills action plan for food and drink manufacturing and processing, it does not go far enough to foster the level of co-operation that is necessary to raise standards.

There is also the need to provide fit-for-purpose careers advice and guidance to students who are attending the CAFRE colleges. Guidance will provide clear and seamless progression routes through to graduate courses at the universities. It is clear that the arrangements, albeit that they have been in place since the Agriculture Act (Northern Ireland) 1949, which gave DARD the central authority to provide education and training for the agriculture sector, are no longer fit for purpose. The continuation of the split responsibility, which is clearly demonstrated in the motion, provides the underlying reason why the education of those who will form the future of our agrifood industry from the farm to the boardroom is being held back.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mrs Dobson: It is, therefore, the responsibility of Departments to pool their resources, put their shoulders to the wheel and deliver for pupils who are studying agriculture at all levels. They are, after all, the future of the industry. We support the motion.

Mr Byrne: As agriculture spokesperson for the SDLP, I congratulate those who tabled the motion, and I support its sentiments and context.

The agrifood sector is a very significant and important part of the Northern Ireland economy, as it sustains over 92,000 people in employment. Over 19,000 of those are linked to food and drink processors, over 30,000 are in primary farm production, and those areas combined generate a further 43,000 jobs indirectly. That represents one quarter of all the manufacturing jobs in Northern Ireland and approximately 20% of the total private sector employment in Northern Ireland.

Despite the recession in other areas, the agrifood sector has grown and continues to show more growth. The world's population is growing by 1·5 million a week. Therefore, there is a market for more agricultural produce and food products from here. Between 1991 and 2011, the number of people who were employed on farms dropped by 13,000. However, that reflects that there are a smaller number of larger farmers. It is important that this agricultural produce has value added to sustain the industry and grow further. We now have a £4 billion industry and the potential to grow further.

Currently, we need to export 80% of our agricultural produce. That means that there is an opportunity that means that, with the right skills and graduates, more of our exports could result in higher-value-added products with more ongoing research and development.

The European Union 2020 R&D money is very important in that regard, and Mr Hazzard made reference to that.

6.00 pm

Queen's University has confirmed that, for the 2011-12 academic year, there were 474 applications for undergraduate degree courses offered by the university's Institute of Agri-Food and Land Use, with 85 students admitted on the course. For 2011-12 postgraduate entry, 49 applications were received for areas of research carried out by the institute, with six students enrolled, which, given the importance of the industry, is a relatively small number.

CAFRE has said that the employment rates for its students are high. Some 94% of Greenmount students were in employment within six months of completing their course. I think that that is one of the few industries in which there is great growth potential for jobs.

In research carried out for a policy brief titled 'Innovation and Skills: Implications for the Agri-food Sector' by AFBI's agricultural and food economics branch, it was found:

> *"companies indicated that the constant factors driving their managers, supervisors, and specialist/technical/professional staff to acquire new skills were: (1) the need to introduce new technologies and equipment, and (2) the need to develop new products and services."*

That all requires highly skilled and qualified employees.

Many companies also stressed the continued requirement for substantial funding assistance from government to support the improvement of training provision and skills levels across the sector, with a particular emphasis on specific scientific and technical training aimed to encourage process and product innovation. Mr Tony O'Neill, who is the chairman of the Agri-food Strategy Board, also stated that more government funding needs to be put into the training of people with expertise and research capabilities in the agrifood sector.

Companies say that, with increased competition from abroad, we need to ensure that we have well-qualified staff so that they can compete when it comes to skills and technology. Posts for production engineers and skilled and semi-skilled workers are hard to fill. Specific specialist and technical expertise were also identified as a key area of skills deficiency. It is clear that there is a greater need for highly qualified graduates and food technologists. There are jobs for them, but we do not have enough trained people at this stage.

Parity has helped CAFRE and DARD to attract graduates. Around 70% of those who complete their LEADER+ programme stay in the food and drink sector. The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Farry, has said that it is for the universities to decide how many places will be available and what courses they will provide, but the universities should be given more funding to develop those areas when there is potential for jobs and growth.

For a long time, one big deficiency in Northern Ireland has been that we do not have a veterinary science course in any university in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Byrne: That is a major deficiency when it comes to the further development of the red meat industry, and I hope that some serious research will be put into trying to get a veterinary science course in Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: I support the motion on behalf of the Alliance Party. One of the key pledges in our Assembly manifesto was to encourage an increase in the number of individuals holding STEM-related qualifications to help ensure that our workforce is capable of contributing to key growth areas in our economy. The agrifood sector is very much one of those key areas, and the food and drink sector and the agriculture industry are playing a crucial role in rebalancing and growing the Northern Ireland economy.

DARD estimates that the food and drink sector was worth nearly £4 billion to the region in 2012, and the value of gross output from the agriculture industry was put at £1·7 billion, so the importance of the agrifood sector cannot be overstated. As the motion states, the sector has the:

> *"potential for significant growth in the future".*

To achieve that potential, we must provide the sector with the necessary skills for high-quality education and training. Our manifesto also committed to increasing the uptake in STEM-related subjects across all levels, from entry level to apprenticeship, technician, degree and higher degree. It is our view that growing areas such as the agrifood sector will be supported through that drive to improve STEM. Understanding and competency in STEM subjects are required to increase levels of research and development in Northern Ireland and to provide businesses with the skills to introduce innovation in their working practices.

Therefore, I welcome the additional 1,200 places for STEM-related programmes that the Minister for Employment and Learning pledged his Department will implement by 2015. I hope that extra places for courses associated with the agrifood sector will follow. The challenge is to ensure that those programmes provide future graduates with the relevant skills to forge successful careers in that area.

That will undoubtedly require collaboration between the Agriculture Department and the Department for Employment and Learning, alongside educational institutions that deliver the programmes and stakeholders in the agrifood sector, to ensure that we can produce an excellent knowledge and skill base in those areas. One platform for achieving that will, I hope, be DEL's future skills action group for food and drink manufacturing and processing — a group set up in conjunction with

the Agriculture Department and Invest NI that includes stakeholders from the industry, employers and further and higher education institutions. The group seems to be a useful vehicle for developing what we can offer in this area.

In addition to those educational programmes, our universities can play further roles in assisting the sector through delivering assistance with product development, providing rural and agricultural policy development or advice, and undertaking applied research connected to the field. Our universities have an excellent reputation for world-leading research. I hope that they will develop their partnerships with the agrifood sector.

I reaffirm the Alliance Party's commitment to supporting our agrifood sector and increasing the education and training associated with the industry to further acknowledge that this is a developing and vital part of our economy. I call for a joined-up approach between the bodies and organisations involved to ensure that we provide degree programmes for future graduates that help them to create world-class careers and results in agrifood in Northern Ireland.

Mr Irwin: If the current horse meat scandal has proved one thing, it is the absolute importance of our local agrifood industry. Food is something that everyone needs and no one can do without. In recent weeks, the revelations about how food is processed, what is added and how it can be traced, tested and verified, have made consumers sit up and take a greater interest in what they are eating.

Consumers can, of course, rest very assured when they eat our own locally produced food that they are eating the very highest-quality produce, which is subject to the most stringent traceability and testing in Europe. Although we farmers moan and groan about paperwork and red tape — there is, of course, far too much of it — for once, perhaps, that has set us apart in a positive fashion from some of our EU neighbours. Our agrifood sector continues to farm well in a climate of economic pressure. That is, in no small part, due to the efforts of our innovative agrifood industry and the endless efforts of those who seek to add value to our locally produced food.

Innovation is a key driver for growth in the agrifood sector. That has been clearly identified by the Assembly, and the UK Government on a wider scale, as a core focus for economic improvement. The need to strengthen the private sector to help rebalance the public sector is recognised. Encouraging growth in agrifood must be an absolute focus for the Executive, given the opportunities that the sector presents.

There are many success stories of local firms having invested significantly in adding value to local produce. In doing so, they have created very appetising products that are sold worldwide. Investing time, money and effort in creating products, finding new markets, and selling our creativity and image internationally as the home of great taste is an undertaking of immense proportions. However, that is being done successfully, and we need to build on that work.

There is no doubt that the input of our graduates is key to the longer-term growth of the sector. I welcome the announcement of the DEL Minister last year that there will be a campaign to make teachers and young people more aware of the career opportunities in the sector. I am interested to hear from Dr Farry about his progress on that important initiative.

I studied a number of reports compiled by agencies relevant to our food industry, and it was clear that more work is required to help maximise the opportunities that will be presented over the next 10 years in supplying domestic and global demand for food. I know that the food industry and agriculture industry are very competitive marketplaces. In the light of that reality, we are punching above our weight locally in terms of innovation and the marketing of our produce further afield.

The domestic and global marketplace is growing steadily. With climate issues in a number of countries affecting the production of food, Northern Ireland and, indeed, the UK will have even greater opportunities to meet the demand, but only if the correct support is in place. I acknowledge that a number of programmes are in place, such as DARD's postgraduate research awards and the skills action plan. We can take pride in the excellent standards that are achieved at our agriculture and food technology institutions. However, if we are to truly realise the sector's potential, we must do more to effectively equip our graduates to enter the workplace and advance the industry, and ensure that we grasp the opportunities that are out there. I support the motion.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the work that has been done to date by the Employment and Learning Minister and the Agriculture Minister.

As has already been said, the agrifood industry is one of the most important employers and one of the more resilient sectors of our local economy. It is a billion-pound industry. At present, more than 60% of the food and drink produced and processed in the North is destined for export. The agrifood sector supports one out of every five jobs in the private sector and employs 92,000 people. Food and drinks processors buy 90% of the local agricultural produce. The multiplier impacts of growth in the sector are considerable. We need to strive for the North to become strategically important as one of the key food-producing regions.

It has been stated that the agrifood sector is, of all the industries in the North, best placed to support rural employment and sustainability. The Agri-Food Strategy Board has been set up to look at how it can further improve turnover and create more jobs. That will be an important report when published.

There is potential for significant growth in the near future. There are export success stories from the North of Ireland's agrifood companies. In my constituency, Fivemiletown Creamery had a major contract win in Asia last year. The Programme for Government highlights an export-led economy as key to achieving sustainable economic growth. Success stories, such as that in Fivemiletown, point to the agrifood sector having a key role in achieving sustainable economic growth. Other success stories include Mash Direct and the Fermanagh-based Kettyle Irish Foods. However, the industry needs to be prepared. It is important to maintain and build upon all of that.

A policy brief prepared by the agriculture and food economics branch of AFBI highlighted the fact that companies expressed a greater need for engagement and

synergy between further education colleges, universities and the industry in relation to the content, design and delivery of education programmes. Levels of skills are important in developing an innovation-led economy. According to 'The Economist' in 2012, it is suggested that:

> *"economies cannot sustain a model in which innovation is driven by a small number of trained elite and supported by a large body of ... low-skilled production workers."*

Growing the North's economy is a key priority, with education and skills at the core of the policy agenda for supporting innovation.

A key weakness in the food and drinks industry is that it has more people of working age with no qualifications. I welcome the fact that the Minister for Employment and Learning has identified the food and drinks manufacturing and processing subsector as a priority for employment and skills provision. There is a skills gap, and it has been identified by employers: a shortage of food technologists and engineers, and management and leadership skills in the industry. That needs to be tackled, given the high rates of unemployment in the North. It is important that we maximise support for the sector.

I also welcome the proposal announced recently for the new food innovation centre at Loughry. Regarding the report yet to be published by the Agri-Food Strategy Board, it is pre-eminent that the skills and capacity of the workforce will form a major strand of its work and, hopefully, go some way towards addressing the skills shortage in the sector. More needs to be done to analyse and engage with the labour market.

6.15 pm

Finally, innovation comes with education. When the skills are there, it will help the industry to further grow and blossom. We need to be thinking progressively, as the agrifood sector is key to keeping the economy running. Education must reflect what the economy needs. I support the motion.

Mrs Overend: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion that has been brought forward by the DUP. I am pleased that the motion calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to act together. That highlights the cross-departmental working that is required if we are to succeed in making the best of our economic potential within the agrifood industry. You could easily add the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to the mix, as it is so important to match the necessary skills with the relevant industry, but, perhaps, the DUP did not want to overly burden its Minister today.

I want to focus largely on the first part of the motion, which states the importance of the agrifood sector to the Northern Ireland economy, as well as the belief that the sector has the potential to achieve significant growth in the future. The importance of the agriculture industry in its totality cannot be understated, as it makes a significant contribution to the Northern Ireland economy. It has an annual output of £1·5 billion and, when taken together with the production and processing industries, it is one of Northern Ireland's largest employers.

The agrifood sector sustains a vast amount of Northern Ireland's private sector workforce. It has also been one of the strongest performers of all sectors in our local economy in recent years. In that respect, it has played a huge role in supporting and sustaining the economy throughout the gloom of a double-dip recession.

The share of total gross value added (GVA) in the agriculture sector in Northern Ireland at 1·6% illustrates that dependence, when compared with 0·7% in Scotland and 0·5% in Wales. If we look at the DARD key statistics from June 2012, we can see the hard employment figures. To give just one example, we can see that there are 25,000 people directly employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing, and 27,000 in food and drink and processing. That equates to around 6·5% of the total workforce. A report published by the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association (NIFDA) shows that every job created in food and drink processing equates to 1·91 jobs in the regional economy. That is a great return.

We are all aware of the tremendous role that the agrifood sector plays in Northern Ireland, but it still has the potential for significant growth. First, we must continue to encourage people to buy local. In light of the recent horse meat scandal, I take this opportunity to put on record the fact that I have complete trust and confidence in our local quality assured beef. Naturally, having grown up on a dairy farm, I have always been a keen advocate for our local dairy products and local beef, but there is also scope to grow some of the lesser known subsectors under the umbrella of agrifood.

Currently, almost half of the gross turnover is provided in two areas: milk and milk-based products; and beef and sheep meat. We can work to grow our poultry meat sector, which, admittedly, will not be helped by the recent Rose Energy decision, and maximise income from such areas as fruit, vegetables and fish. I cannot forgo the opportunity to promote pork in the House, although I may need to express an interest, considering that my husband might benefit from it.

Opening up foreign markets for exports is also key, and I have said before in the House that we need a more ambitious export strategy. We should be encouraging those in the agrifood sector to explore the options and opportunities available to them further afield. Knowledge and contacts are, of course, vital in that.

There is also the issue of skills, which the motion specifically deals with. The sector cannot grow without the necessary skills base, and our two universities are vital to that. I note that the future skills action plan for food and drink manufacturing and processing was tasked with advising, designing, developing and testing new interventions to meet existing and future skills needs within the sector. To be fair, that plan makes mention of schools, colleges and universities.

I had the pleasure of visiting and touring the food technology campus at Loughry. I found it most interesting to hear that those who have gone into that profession often find that they have a long and committed career in that field.

However, there is a specific need to increase graduate programmes. That needs to be rectified. Statistically, there are lower levels of graduates in the agrifood sector compared with other sectors. That trend must be reversed.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mrs Overend: We must work to achieve a situation whereby more graduates choose to go into that sector and demand and supply is such that employers actually demand graduate-entry employees.

Mr Rogers: As a Member for South Down, I extend my sympathies to the Grant family on the tragic loss of their little son Daniel at the weekend. I am sure that the thoughts and prayers of the House are with them at this tragic time.

I thank the Members opposite for tabling the motion. The agrifood industry has changed over the decades as farming, fishing, food production and marketing has become a highly scientific operation. With a severe reduction in profit margins and increasing worldwide competition, it is essential that Northern Ireland is at the cutting edge of research and development. I cannot help but remember Mrs Dobson's comment about farmers having the reins. Farming has moved on a long way since farmers had reins and the little grey Ferguson. Today's farmers are highly skilled businessmen, engineers, accountants and scientists. In a similar way, our fishermen had to develop their skills set in order to survive.

Other Members talked about the impact that it has on the Northern Ireland economy. It has also made a major contribution to what happens here. In 2010, the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association published a report entitled, 'Value of Food and Drink Industry to Northern Ireland'. The report highlighted the significant contribution that the agrifood sector makes, employing directly up to 50,000 people and generating over £800 million in value-added to the economy. Almost as many jobs again are created in the upstream supply chain and ancillary industries, helping to sustain the rural community.

A recent survey was conducted around 234 school leavers and graduates in the sector. In that survey, employers were asked how well prepared they were for the world of work. Over 40% felt that they were poorly prepared. Employers also indicated that a proportion of employees need to improve their essential skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT. I acknowledge the Minister's presence here today. However, as Mrs Overend said earlier, a cross-sectoral approach is needed from the Department of Education with regard to developing numeracy, literacy and STEM subjects; the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; DARD; and, of course, the Minister for Employment and Learning himself.

From an innovation perspective, combining education and training with practical knowledge, generated by experience in the production process, is an important driver for incremental innovation. In addition to the specialised and technical competences that are required for some jobs in the sector, the possession of more generic skills, such as problem-solving, analytical skills, creativity, team work and communication skills are considered important. Those skills shortages were identified most commonly in the position of managers, supervisors, specialists, professionals and technical employees.

A combination of innovative products, processes and practices is, clearly, the driving force behind the need for new skills in the sector. Deeper analysis of the study shows that employers suggest that they did not recruit from schools or university because recruits would be unlikely to have enough relevant work experience. What is the solution? Companies expressed a need for engagement and greater linkage between the further education colleges, CAFRE, universities and industry on the content, design and delivery of educational programmes, so that teaching and training adequately meets the needs of the sector. Integration of work experience in the course curriculum was a priority alongside the need for more business-related teaching to be included in relevant courses.

Government and industry need to work together to develop the skills base in the industry. Important skills gaps need to be tackled, such as marketing and senior management skills, and on-farm, animal nutrition and generic traits, if the industry to increase its competitiveness. It also needs to raise the level of investment in research and development at every step of the supply chain.

With regard to the impact in rural areas, a successful and growing food and drinks industry will generate more employment and income for the rural economy, from where it sources and where many businesses are located. The industry is probably the single most important source of sustaining the rural population.

We can learn from other jurisdictions, such as the Scottish Executive and the Irish Government. We do not have to reinvent the wheel. Let us learn from our neighbours. We are not merely talking about growth; we are talking about smart growth. A Member mentioned Mash Direct, so I have to plug Rooney Fish in Kilkeel.

The impact of the agrifood sector on the Northern Ireland economy must not be underestimated. With over a quarter of Northern Ireland's manufacturing jobs and a contribution to the economy of over £500 million, the opportunities afforded to graduates —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Mr Rogers: — in the sector must not be overlooked. There is potential to provide stability to the economy, create thousands of new jobs and increase the impact of our rural areas. However, this can be achieved only by improving productivity and enhancing the skills —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Rogers: — of our workforce. I support the motion.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion on behalf of my colleagues and me. I thank the proposer of the motion for raising this important issue and all Members who contributed to the debate.

The agrifood industry is vital to our economy. It is one of the key sectors identified by the Executive in the Programme for Government and the economic strategy, and it was recognised by my Department as being in the priority skills sectors that contribute to rebuilding and rebalancing the local economy. The latest available information shows that gross turnover from the food and drink processing industry is around £3·7 billion. That figure has been growing over recent years. Taken together, the farming and processing industries contribute well over £900 million per annum to the economy in Northern Ireland and represent around 4% of the total gross value added. In 2011, the industries employed approximately 52,000 people, which represents about 6·5% of overall

employment and about 10% of private sector employment. Therefore, the importance of the agrifood sector to the local economy in value added and jobs sustained is not in dispute.

Consequently, the Executive, my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have targeted the sector for growth. In support of that, in May 2012, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment set up the Agri-Food Strategy Board, which is tasked with developing a strategic plan for the agrifood sector. The work of the board reaches across the subsectors of the supply chain. It has identified a number of themes, including skills and capability. Although provisional figures provided by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development show that the total income from farming decreased substantially in 2012, the food and drink processing sector has remained resilient, with turnover continuing to grow and the number of employees increasing.

Notwithstanding the setback for agriculture, my ministerial colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle O'Neill, believes that, as the world population grows, we have many reasons to be positive. I agree with Minister O'Neill that there are opportunities ahead. We must position our Departments and the sector to take full advantage. My Department will work with DARD to improve the competitive nature of the local economy and build an industry that has the strength and resilience to withstand the types of setback recently witnessed by the local agriculture sector. That is why I have identified the food and drink manufacturing and processing industry as a key sector for my Department to focus its employment and skills provision on.

Although the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has overall policy responsibility for the development of the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland, my Department is committed to ensuring that the sector is provided with the appropriately skilled individuals whom it needs to flourish. My Department interacts with the industry in various ways. In higher education, it funds research and education related to the food industry. The further education sector delivers apprenticeship training and specific in-company training. The Department funds and performance manages the sector skills councils relating to the food industry. The Department also funds a wide range of apprenticeship training and employability initiatives. In 2009-2010, DEL contributed over £2 million to the food sector in that regard.

6.30 pm

Employers in the sector have identified a number of skills issues. As a result, my Department has established a future skills action group for food and drink manufacturing and processing. That group has been set up in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Invest Northern Ireland, and it includes representatives from the industry, employers, and further and higher education. The group's aim is to bring stakeholders together to identify the skills issues that are facing the industry and to look at ways of addressing them. Those issues include difficulties recruiting sufficient numbers of graduates, a lack of food technologists and engineers, and the need to increase management and leadership skills. A number of Members identified those issues during the debate.

I launched the resultant skills action plan in June 2012, and work is ongoing to take forward interventions to encourage employers to avail themselves of existing training; to develop a programme of engagement with undergraduates to educate them about careers in the sector; to increase the science content in degree programmes to ensure that the qualifications meet the needs of industry —

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for giving way. There is a gap in Northern Ireland in that we do not have a veterinary science degree course. Does the Minister recognise that there may be an opportunity to have a combined effort between CAFRE, which has agricultural lands and research facilities for agriculture, and Queen's University, which has built up some expertise in science over the years?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Byrne for raising that point. Minister O'Neill and I are keeping that under close observation and review. At present, a considerable number of trained vets are available, so there is no immediate shortage. However, there may be shortages in particular subsectors of veterinary medicine, as, of course, veterinary practitioners cover a wide range of different activities. We are certainly willing to have discussions and to consider alternative models by which we can address some of those different skills shortages. We are also keen to ensure that there is close co-operation between all the providers, whether they are in higher education or the further education sector.

I can certainly give the commitment that we will continue to explore the issue. However, in doing so, I would give a certain word of caution that, at best, mixed signals are coming across about the actual level of demand and how the existing provision of qualified people fits in with that.

One of the other themes of the future skills action plan is the need to develop an engineering apprenticeship that will meet the requirements of the food and drink processing sector.

A number of elements in the plan are now well progressed. For example, representatives from the sector attractiveness programme Tasty Careers have booked visits with 50 post-primary schools to educate young people and teachers about the wide range of quality careers that are available throughout the industry. Discussions are also under way to develop a similar programme for universities so that they can target appropriate undergraduates who may never have considered working in the food and drink processing industry.

I think that it is important that we stress that a huge range of different activities are involved in the food and drink manufacturing sector. Indeed, although certain aspects may have an image problem that may inhibit people from considering that sector for a career, it is important that people are aware of the breadth of activities they can become involved in. It is also important that people are aware of the wider message, which a number of Members sought to get across, that the industry is growing and has a significant gross valued added. As such, people can have a stable carer and one that provides a considerable degree of success and reward.

Through the higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, I have stressed my commitment to ensure that

Northern Ireland's higher education institutions support the local economy, and I have reaffirmed my Department's commitment to help those institutions to become more responsive to industry's skills needs. Graduating to Success also highlights the need to enhance graduates' employability prospects. That will be taken forward through the implementation plan.

To provide the agrifood sector with appropriately skilled graduates, Queen's University and the University of Ulster offer a broad range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the areas of food science and the wider agrifood sector. The Department of Agriculture's College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise also provides higher education courses, validated by Queen's University and the University of Ulster, in a range of subjects that includes agriculture, food and horticulture. Demand for those courses is increasing. For example, I am advised by the Department of Agriculture that 743 students were enrolled on its full-time and part-time higher education courses in the current academic year. Total enrolments have increased by 25% over the past five years, with full-time enrolments up by almost 50% in the same period.

When new courses are being developed, representatives from the industry and sector skills councils are closely consulted on course content, structure and pathways within qualifications to ensure that graduates are equipped to meet current industry requirements. In addition, the Department of Agriculture is investing significantly in the provision of new facilities to support the continued delivery of higher education programmes at the college. A new dairy unit is about to be commissioned at the Greenmount campus and a new food innovation centre is bring planned for the Loughry campus. Those facilities are also used for technology projects that underpin technology transfer to industry. My previous announcement to fund an additional 1,200 places for STEM-related programmes will have implications for the sector, and it further underlines my commitment. It is worth stressing that we regard agriculture- and agrifood-related skills as fitting under STEM and that universities have the flexibility to increase provision in those areas. The universities are mindful of their role in supporting the economy, particularly locally, by ensuring that there is a pool of graduates skilled in relevant areas. Therefore, the universities should provide and resource courses in response to changes in demand for graduates.

In addition to the agrifood undergraduate provision in the universities and the agricultural colleges, the universities undertake research. Such research capability is vital for economic growth, competitiveness and the well-being of the community. As the major suppliers of research in Northern Ireland, the universities have a vital role to play. 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. That is a UK-wide exercise to assess research quality. The research showed that half the assessed research in Northern Ireland is rated either internationally excellent or world-leading, and more than 98% of Northern Irish researchers are working in disciplines in which world-leading research is taking place. My Department has responsibility for funding higher education research and will allocate almost £50 million in recurrent funding in the present academic year.

This year, the Department introduced a new funding model that supports internationally excellent and world-leading research, as well as targeting a proportion of research funding at STEM areas and those of wider economic relevance. Agrifood has been identified as a target market for growth in Northern Ireland. The model aspires to achieve the dual aims of pursuing international excellence in R&D while ensuring that the current and future needs of the local economy are met. In collaborating with local businesses, the Connected programme has enabled the universities and further education colleges to provide a highly effective one-stop shop for businesses wishing to access the expertise and knowledge in the local research base. Through the current programme, Connected 2, the higher and further education sectors have proactively developed additional strategic links with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and CAFRE. It is anticipated that those additional linkages will enable Connected to better meet the knowledge transfer needs of the agrifood and biotechnology industry.

I welcome the healthy demand for those agrifood courses and research studentships, and recognise the important role that our universities and colleges play in supplying the sector with appropriately skilled individuals. Both Queen's University and the University of Ulster remain committed to deepening their contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of this region and its global standing. The universities play a significant role in supporting the growing agrifood sector, contributing to agricultural and rural policy developments and advice, undertaking applied research and assisting product development. Both universities are keen to work in partnership with my Department's future skills action group and to enhance engagements with the agrifood sector to develop provision and to promote agrifood careers.

Mr Frew: I commend the motion to the House, as my colleagues have already spoken on it. I welcome the consensus throughout the Chamber from all parties supporting the motion. We recognise the importance of the agrifood sector to the economy and the wealth that it brings to this country. It should be supported by all in the Chamber because it is very important to the fabric not only of our economy but of society as a whole. The agrifood sector is not just about farming. I think that we all realise that, but it is important to state it. It is a science. It is manufacturing. It is engineering. It is accounting. It is everything nowadays, because even if you are on the farm, you need all those skills, and much more.

Of course, it is not just about the farm; it is about the process the whole way through. It is important that, while we grow and we support growth, we must support educated growth, because that way we will be able to get much more out of our industry and much more wealth into our nation. Farming has never let us down in the past, so why should it let us down now? Why should we, as a government, let it down? There is absolutely no reason why. That is why we need to support it and ensure that what we are doing now is right for that growth, right for the agrifood sector and right for the farming industry, and that we are supporting it as best we can, because there are threats to it.

There are threats to the very industry that we always talk about as rising, as growing and as being the future. Not least of those threats is the weather, which I do not think

any Minister in the House can do anything about. There is also CAP reform. It has not been mentioned here once — we have been very positive — but CAP reform is a big threat. It could hurt the giants in our agrifood industry: beef and sheep meat; milk and milk products; and the poultry meat — all the giants that play such an important part in our agrifood sector. It could hurt those subsectors terribly, so we have to be very mindful that we support the industry, recognise the threats and understand the needs of the industry.

Farming and the agrifood sector have an important social element; it is not just about commercial interests or capitalism. That is why we have the CAP and single farm payments — to input to the industry and to help with food production and food security, which is a major issue throughout Europe. Europe is always mindful of the issue of food. Food can affect everything, from inflation to interest rates; it can affect the stability of a nation state, even in Europe. It is very important that we recognise that and help it to grow, because it will bring wealth to our nation and our people.

Another threat is, undoubtedly, the horse meat scandal and everything that that brings, including the uncertainty at the present time. I will reassure you again, because I have been echoing it through our airwaves and our TV screens for weeks: I have 100% assurance of the quality of meat that we produce in Northern Ireland, which is 100% traceable and which comes from the farm. It comes from the gate to the plate. There is absolutely no issue with that.

6.45 pm

As has been mentioned, there is always a silver lining to every dark cloud. You have only to go to a butcher's shop these days to see the queues that are forming outside. Those people know about assurance and they trust the local industry and what it produces.

This is not only an opportunity for us to help our local butchers, but to export even further and tell the world that what we produce is good, lean, green meat. That signal should go out to the world; it is something that the Executive should be encouraged to do, and we will do it today.

Sandra Overend spoke about joined-up government and about all the Ministers working together. She mentioned the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and said that we did not want to burden her. We are looking forward to the aftermath of the next election, when we will have all three Departments to do the work. We need to join up government better and we need to have focus.

The agrifood strategy board, which the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment introduced along with DARD, is due to publish a report very soon. We look forward to that because it is about the stakeholders, who are the key drivers in the industry, being given the chance to inform government about the way forward. It is very important that we never lose sight of that and that we ask the experts what support they need and how we go about growing. It is important that we always keep an eye on the stakeholders and the experts in the industry.

There are still problems with Europe. The laying hens directive put a massive burden on our industry, as did the pigs directive. Yet, member states all over Europe do not enforce those rules while we do. That leaves our industry in a very difficult position, because it has done a lot of good but is penalised and left at a disadvantage when it comes to exporting its produce. That should not be allowed to happen.

There is a need to educate people in our sector, but there is also a very important indirect influence, which comes from scientists and experts who deal with and identify new threats and who help to eradicate diseases. Those people are very important and the industry cannot do without them.

I now turn to some other comments that were made by Members. Tom Buchanan talked about the importance of the agrifood sector, as we all did. He also mentioned the horse meat scandal, as we all have. We also talked about importing meat. Why are we still importing so much meat into this country when we export so much? We should look to exploit that at this time.

Chris Hazzard talked about the new innovation centre and highlighted the agriculture campuses, going into detail on the work at CAFRE and its work at Loughry and Enniskillen. He talked about the dangers of skills gaps, which is very important. We cannot leave anyone behind.

Jo-Anne Dobson talked about the popularity of farming and the agrifood sector at this time. She mentioned falling farm incomes, which is another threat to the industry. Farming succession is another serious threat. Graduates are coming out of universities and colleges but it takes them too long — nearly a lifetime — to take over the family business. We need to look at that, and I know that the Ulster Farmers' Union and others are looking at the issue of farming succession.

Joe Byrne welcomed the fact that the DUP brought the motion to the House. We appreciate his kind words. He talked about the work of the agriculture colleges and about adding value to sustain the sector. He also mentioned government financial input, which is very important. It is important that the Minister not only supports the colleges and the universities with funding for places, but with money for research and innovation.

Sandra Overend mentioned her desperate desire to help the pig industry. I understand that, because Sandra knows that industry all too well. It needs support, along with our other major giants.

One of the major giants, which no one ever seems to mention, is the bakeries. Bakeries are up there when it comes to employment in the agrifood sector. We always seem to forget that. We talk about the production of food and meat, but we forget about the bakeries and how much employment they bring, which is very important.

I take what the Minister said about the commitment to funding, research places and a future skills action plan.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Frew: We welcome his words about the STEM subjects and the importance of STEM to this sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the importance of the agrifood sector to the Northern Ireland economy; believes that this sector has the potential for significant growth in the future; recognises the need for graduates in this area and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister

of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote graduate programmes in this sector, particularly within our two universities.

Adjourned at 6.50 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 26 February 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Speaker's Business

Mr Speaker: I advise Members that I will be absent from the Assembly on Monday 4 March on official Assembly business.

Ministerial Statements

Social Housing

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on my proposals for social housing following the fundamental review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Further to my written statement to the Assembly on 9 January, I want to take this opportunity to address Assembly colleagues and provide more information on the proposed new structures.

The change in structures is required to ensure that we can continue to deliver well-maintained housing stock, improve the focus on strategy and ensure value for money for taxpayers in the future. That restructuring should not be approached with anxiety. Rather, it is an opportunity for us to become more efficient and innovative in delivering and maintaining social housing to taxpayers and tenants alike.

Over the past few years, there have been a number of reports that recommended that it was time to review the structures to ensure future service delivery. In particular, the Savills stock condition survey report on the NIHE housing stock, which was published in May 2009, identified that over £5 billion of investment would be required over the next 30 years to maintain the current NIHE stock, which Northern Ireland obviously cannot afford. It is important that we look at innovative and sustainable ways of providing social housing, in particular how best we can use the capital value of the housing stock and the rental income to secure borrowing to meet the future need.

I want to stress from the outset that I view this as the start of a process of discussion and deliberation during which my Department will engage and consult widely with key stakeholders to develop the detail behind these high-level proposals and to ensure that there is consensus and agreement. I am committed to working closely with the Social Development Committee and other stakeholders throughout this process.

The Housing Executive has a long track record over the past 40 years of improving social housing stock. My proposals for the reform of social housing are about acknowledging the past achievements in social housing provision whilst clearly focusing on future sustainability and delivery for the benefit of tenants and the taxpayer. The fundamental review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2011 found that the current model and structures no longer allowed optimal delivery of either strategic housing or landlord services. The consensus from a series of

meetings with stakeholders concluded that the “do nothing” option was not a realistic solution.

Over the past few weeks since I made the written statement, there has been a lot of unhelpful and perhaps uninformed speculation about my proposals. In light of that and before I outline the proposals, let me say something about what they are not. They are not fully agreed detailed proposals. They are a high-level vision and strategic direction of travel that brings to a new stage much of the discussion and debate that there has been about reform of social housing over the past number of years. It removes the uncertainty about what we are trying to achieve and allows open debate, discussion and consultation on how we can achieve that vision to ensure that we have consensus and agreement. They are not about abolishing the Housing Executive. They are about improving the structures for the delivery of those functions. They do not herald large-scale job losses, and, as I have made clear, the staff in the Housing Executive currently delivering landlord and non-landlord functions will still have to deliver those functions but in different, more focused and financially sustainable structures.

By the end of March 2015, I aim to have in place a sustainable housing system that delivers regional social housing needs through new landlord structures and housing associations and is strategically directed, governed and regulated. There are several proposals that I wish to be explored and developed. First, the Department will continue to have responsibility for overall housing strategy, policy, legislation and funding. Such a model recognises the key role of the Minister, the Executive and the Assembly in establishing and scrutinising the overall housing strategy and priorities for Northern Ireland. My publication of the draft housing strategy for Northern Ireland, ‘Facing the Future’, on 15 October clearly shows the lead role that is expected of and should be delivered by the Minister and the Department responsible for housing.

Secondly, I want to ensure robust regulation and inspection of the housing sector. That is an essential element of any new structures. The Department operates a robust regulation and inspection regime that provides assurance to the Minister and accounting officer on the quality of services provided by and governance of the housing sector. I want the landlord function of the Housing Executive to clearly operate in that regime, be subject to inspection and be required to register with the Department, as do all other social housing providers. I propose to expand on the existing powers of regulation to include additional powers of intervention and direction where shortcomings are found. That will be within a robust regulatory framework that provides assurances to me, as Minister, and to the Committee that social housing providers that receive public funds are operating appropriately.

In the context of a rent-setting regime, I propose that an independent social housing rent panel is established to agree annual rent levels within the parameters of a fiscal rental policy based on affordability set by me, as Minister, and subject to the scrutiny of the Assembly. This is a critical issue, and it is important to stress that rent policy will be set by the Minister.

I intend that the current Housing Executive non-landlord functions will fall under the remit of a Northern Ireland regional housing body. A number of key housing operations and services currently undertaken by the Housing Executive will need to be delivered at a regional level. This will be a body of housing professionals and experts providing and delivering key operational strategies and services — in effect, the non-landlord functions — including but not limited to administration of the common selection scheme; assessment of need; the social housing development programme; warm homes; and Supporting People. I am clear that these key functions will remain with the regional housing body. Currently, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is classified as a public corporation. The development of these proposals will require legislative change and include consideration of the most appropriate vehicle for such a body — for example, a non-departmental public body or an agency. In either case, there will be a need to review the governance and board structures to take account of the legislative changes and the new roles and responsibilities.

I support the case for separating the landlord function to both allow appropriate focus on this area of service provision to tenants and to ensure that the landlord function can access private funding to allow suitable investment. The case for the separation of the new landlord function and the positioning of it within the housing association movement is dependent on agreement on the financial considerations, notably the reclassification of the new body being outwith the public sector. Key to this and central to the consideration of the right structures — this is why I referred to the housing association movement — is that we need structures that will be acceptable to and therefore funded by the financial institutions. They will need to have the confidence of the financial institutions. The design process will consider how this can be achieved, looking at the current housing association model and the potential for bespoke bodies to take this forward. Another consideration is how to effectively engage tenants in this process to ensure a focus on tenant services and social housing delivery and improvement. I have no preconceptions of how many landlords there will be, as this will be subject to further analysis, including financial consideration, economic appraisals and engagement with key stakeholders.

To establish effective local government liaison, I propose to review the role of the Housing Council. The Housing Council was established in 1971 and is an advisory and consultative body that considers any matter affecting housing referred to it by the Department or the Housing Executive. The Housing Council is made up of one nominee from each of the current 26 councils. In considering the proposed new housing structures, I was mindful of the need to look at the role of the Housing Council, both in this context and taking account of the role of the Assembly and Assembly scrutiny, and the local government reform proposals and the future functions of councils. The Housing Council in its present format and structure is not the best model for the new system. I propose to consult on the best means to achieve local council engagement in relation to housing matters.

My departmental officials have commenced the programme of work to explore and develop these proposals, the first steps of which have only begun since the written statement was made. On the day that the statement was made, my officials held discussions with the chief executive and the Housing Executive director of personnel and management services to address primary

staff concerns and to work jointly to allay staff anxieties. My officials and I have met other stakeholders in the few short weeks since the written statement was issued — the NIHE board, NIPSA, the Social Development Committee, the Housing Council and the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations — to further dialogue that began under the review of the NIHE and to begin the process of collaborative working on taking the proposals forward and addressing concerns. In particular, the Social Development Committee has a key part to play in providing scrutiny of the design of the new structures.

10.45 am

My Department is developing a programme of work to fully explore and design my proposals. A programme board has been established that includes the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, to provide oversight of the delivery of this reform. The board's first meeting was held on 28 January.

I am committed to working collaboratively on this process, and I am keen to explore all options for the delivery of sustainable social housing both for tenants and taxpayers. I am committed to ensuring that the implications for staff arising from future structural changes are carefully managed. A detailed programme of projects will be established to deliver reform changes, and human resource issues will be a key aspect of that. Processes for communication and engagement with staff and their representatives will be an important part of the overall work programme.

I want to make one matter very clear. Much has been achieved in housing over the past 40 years. However, changes need to occur if we want to ensure that social housing in Northern Ireland can be a success for the next 40 years. The PwC report concluded and stakeholders agreed:

"'do nothing' is not an option."

Now is the time for change.

The strategic direction, as set out in my proposed plans, is not without its challenges. However, it sets out a compelling and sustainable future vision for new structures to support the future development and delivery of housing in Northern Ireland. It is my belief that this is what we need to do to support the most vulnerable in our society, and my Executive colleagues have supported the exploration of the proposals. I trust that colleagues across the Chamber will also endorse this approach.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your indulgence, I will make a few remarks on behalf of the Social Development Committee. I thank the Minister for his statement to the Assembly.

I have had the opportunity to discuss some of these matters at length with the Minister prior to this. The Committee has taken a keen interest in the need to take housing issues forward in this mandate. Although welfare reform has rightly dominated the Committee's programme of work until now, the Committee has argued the need for an overarching housing strategy. The future provision of social housing is, of course, a key element of that.

The Committee has acknowledged the Minister's assurance that this announcement heralds almost a blank canvas that will provide the opportunity for all stakeholders, including tenants, to have a real say in shaping social housing going into the future. The Committee also welcomes the Minister's confirmation that there are no predetermined outcomes for the precise model for the delivery of the landlord function.

The Committee is keen to work with the Minister and his Department in the time ahead, and it is committed to doing so not only so that it can scrutinise the Department's work in this very important area of social policy but so that it can help the Minister and his Department to shape the proposals. As the Minister said, the aim is to make sure that this is a positive development — I believe that it can and will be — so that we will end this mandate setting housing structures and can go into the next mandate and the next 20 or 30 years on a very positive and solid foundation. That means that we can ensure that the people we collectively represent who are in need of a home will get that home and a roof over their head.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his statement. One of the issues that will be in the mind of many Housing Executive tenants will be the sort of benefits that can come from this reform package. Will the Minister give some details of any stock transfers that have already taken place and say how the issue of improvements and rents can be dealt with?

Mr McCausland: I will address the transfer of stock to housing associations. The first to take place was the Rinmore scheme in Londonderry. That was a good example. There were a total of 55 houses in Rinmore, an area in Creggan in Londonderry. That scheme transferred from the Housing Executive to Apex. Of the 55 properties, 14 have had improvements completed, with the rent charge increasing accordingly. Four are currently undergoing improvements, and the rent charge has not changed at this stage. Improvements to the remaining 37 properties have not yet commenced, and, again, the rent charge has not changed.

There are good examples of work that will be carried forward: multi-element improvements to kitchens, rewiring bathrooms and improving installation and energy efficiency. There are two critical factors in the transfer. First, tenants have been able to benefit from properties that have been significantly improved through the housing association being able to lever in private finance to fund the work, which is something that simply would not have been achieved from the public purse alone. Secondly, throughout the process, tenants were made fully aware of the implications of the transfer for them, not only in improving their home but in other matters.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his long statement. It is disappointing that he said little apart from wishing to "explore" and "develop" proposals for which there is already scant detail. Given that, in July 2012, the Minister accused the Housing Executive of having failed its tenants, I am sure that neither he nor his party, for a series of other reasons, will be sad to see it go. Will he tell us about the future for undeveloped land owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive?

Mr McCausland: The Member refers to comments that I made about failures and shortcomings in the Northern

Ireland Housing Executive. I am sure that the concerns that I expressed at that time were shared by Members from all parties across the Chamber, because there were serious matters to do with the quality of delivery for tenants and serious questions about the value for money of some of the management and maintenance contracts.

I have had real concerns about the operation of the Housing Executive since coming into the Department. Therefore, I believe that we are going in the right direction of travel. We are in a better place than we were. We have a new chairman and vice-chairman who have brought great expertise and experience to the Housing Executive, and that has been transformative. We also have a new chief executive. A lot of good work is going on, and there is a good relationship there moving forward.

The Member asked questions about the structure and so on. All those things will be teased out over the next while. The land currently in the ownership of the Housing Executive is a valuable asset. There is work to be done on all these things. We want to ensure that a full business case is worked out for every aspect of the process and every opportunity and every possible line of travel is explored. I do not want to start closing down anything at this stage. We need to start exploring ways in which to get the best outcome and best value for tenants and taxpayers.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the proper manner in which it was brought to the House. The Minister's aim to have a new system and new structures in place by the end of this mandate is ambitious. On the landlord function, his statement indicates the potential for bespoke bodies to be looked at. At this early stage, can the Minister give any details of how those bespoke bodies might look or operate?

Mr McCausland: There are two points there. First, we should be ambitious, and the people of Northern Ireland deserve that we be ambitious, so that we get the best possible outcome as soon as possible. That is for the benefit of tenants and the taxpayer. Secondly, it would be presumptuous of and inappropriate for me to spell out at this stage what the bespoke structures might be. That is the work that the programme oversight body now needs to take forward . Every opportunity will be afforded for input. If the Member has particular views and ideas, those will certainly be welcomed. We will take views from the Social Development Committee and other stakeholders as we move forward.

I say in passing — I made this comment earlier — that it is important that we make sure that, whatever form it takes, the landlord function has the confidence of the financial institutions so that we get the benefit of drawing in private sector money.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement. I must say that it is somewhat concerning and startling that a statement of this significance on the most fundamental reform of housing in years has failed to make any reference to the deeply segregated nature of housing in Northern Ireland. I ask the Minister what support and challenges he will give to the new structures to ensure that they meet the Belfast Agreement requirement to encourage and facilitate shared and mixed housing in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCausland: That point has been made on a number of occasions by Members of the Alliance Party. I will simply say that we are dealing here with the social housing sector. Segregation is also a factor in the private sector. Many areas where everyone is a homeowner are as deeply segregated as any other, so it is not unique to the social housing sector. Moving forward, we also need to bear it in mind that social housing segregation can often also be related to other forms of segregation. The Member will be aware that we have segregated education and we have sporting organisations that are effectively segregated. All these things are interrelated because they are all part of society, and they impact on each other and on where people want and decide to live.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. One of the issues that will have to be dealt with will be the significant stock transfer from the Housing Executive. Can the Minister give an indication of his assessment of the capability of the housing association sector to deal with that possible transfer?

Mr McCausland: At the moment, the housing association sector in Northern Ireland has 34,000 houses. We have 29 associations. There are mergers going on. Six associations are currently suspended from developing, and 23 are free to develop. So, it is a mixed story. There are encouraging aspects, and there are some that are not so encouraging and require a lot of support. That having been said, even the largest association has 4,600 properties, so you are dealing with associations with fewer than 5,000 houses. We are dealing here with 90,000 stock. There is a huge disparity there. That is why, at an earlier stage, I spoke about bespoke housing associations.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh mile maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. It certainly puts more flesh on the bones of the future of housing and where the strategic direction will be over the next 30 years. However, is it not the Minister's intention to break the landlord function into three separate bodies that would see a north-western housing association, a Belfast housing association and a south-eastern housing association, each containing 30,000 houses? If that is the case, would it not be detrimental to dealing with social need and high housing demand?

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

Mr McCausland: On the question of whether you would break it up into three separate associations or whatever, all these things are still to be explored. There is some evidence from initial conversations with the financial institutions that they would prefer and be more favourable towards a number of housing associations or bodies rather than a single one, but all that is open to discussion over the next while. Nothing is predetermined. If that is a view that the Member wishes to put forward, I will be happy to consider it.

Mr Anderson: I also thank the Minister for his detailed statement. In relation to good housing standards, will the restructuring of housing lead to a better standard of housing for the many tenants of the Housing Executive who live in homes without cavity walls and, therefore, have no wall insulation, which results in them facing real fuel poverty due to huge heating costs that they can ill afford?

11.00 am

Mr McCausland: The Member touches on an important point, which is that we have to face up to the backlog of work in maintaining the quality of stock. The £5 billion of investment that I said would be required over the next 30 years is a significant figure. In the short term, about £1 billion worth of work is required, and that money is simply not there at the moment.

The Member highlighted the issue of the quality of housing. There are about 9,000 social housing stock properties in Northern Ireland that date to just after the Second World War. In fact, many were built in the 1950s, without wall cavities and, therefore, have no cavity wall insulation. In the past, the issue may not have been as immediate but it certainly is now when fuel prices are rising and people are much affected by fuel poverty.

As a result of having no cavity wall insulation, those houses are very hard to heat. There can also be issues of dampness and other problems that flow from that. There needs to be major investment if we are to deal with that sort of work. I am concerned not only that we move forward with our housing development programme but that we ensure that tenants in older properties are enabled to live in a property that is fit for the present century and easy to heat. At the moment, 9,000 properties do not meet those standards, so there is a huge amount of work to be done. That was identified as a piece of work to be explored as to the best way forward.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement, which dispelled a little of the mist but not a lot. At the risk of sounding cynical, is the Housing Executive, having failed to keep its properties properly maintained over the years, now divesting itself of them at virtually no cost to the housing associations? How many landlords will then be there to pick up the pieces? Has any financial work or an economic appraisal been done on the whole exercise vis-à-vis switching particular estates to housing associations, presumably at a knock-down price? How can we ensure out of all of that, Minister, that new building will be going ahead on top of the maintenance that we are hoping will be done by those associations that will gain the houses?

Mr McCausland: I would encourage the Member to read the PwC report, which did quite a lot of work on exploring the best way forward. He asked whether calculations were done. Of course they were done. That was part of the PwC report. Now, as we move forward to the next stage of the process, everything will be assessed as to the financial viability, the best outcome and what produces the best result. This is all about producing a better outcome for the people of Northern Ireland, for the tenants and the taxpayers.

It is clear that many tenants — and the figure of 9,000 tenants was mentioned — are still living in post-war properties that do not have cavity wall insulation. That is simply unacceptable in this day and age. When you look at an issue such as that, the shambles over some of the maintenance contracts that we had with the Housing Executive, and the difficulties with contractors, it is clear that we need to change the situation. Doing nothing is not an option but everything will be properly assessed as we move forward.

I am not clear as to the reasons for the Member's doubts about the need for this. I think that it is absolutely essential.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. The statement referred to the strategic arm of housing; the non-landlord functions; administration of the common selection scheme; assessment of need; the social housing development programme; warm homes; and supporting people. Where does the administration of housing benefit fit in with those proposals? Will it be taken on by another Department or will it be administered by the private sector?

Mr McCausland: The issue of housing benefit is now subsumed into universal credit, so that process is being worked through the Assembly, albeit somewhat slowly.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aíre. On the ninety-odd thousand houses presently in the management of the Housing Executive, would their future not be better placed under the management of a single landlord?

Mr McCausland: Some people have suggested three; some have suggested one; I have heard people suggest five. All sorts of numbers are floating about. That is a piece of work that is still to be carried out. In due course, when we have had a full exploration and full consultation with stakeholders, the Social Development Committee and everyone with a potential input, we will come to a conclusion. It would be totally wrong, and I am sure Members would not expect me to do so, to prejudge the outcome of a consultation and deliberation that is only just starting.

Mr Allister: In the early part of his statement, the Minister reminded us that the stock condition survey, back in 2009, showed that, over the next 30 years, there would need to be investment of £5 billion — money that we could not afford. The Minister's magic bullet seems to be to get in private money. How does he then square the circle of interesting the private sector to that extent while, at the same time, maintaining rents at an affordable level? Is that not really the challenge that the Minister faces? How does he intend to meet the financial deficit while keeping the rents at an affordable level?

Mr McCausland: That is a question that the Member has asked previously. It is clear that £5 billion worth of work is to be done over a period of time. That would be funded through borrowing from financial institutions. That is now the practice elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Go to Glasgow or other parts of Scotland, England and Wales, and you will see that that is now the way in which housing is structured. So, we are getting in line with others who have already moved down this road. Financial institutions do have an interest in this. They are prepared to invest, if we have the right structure.

As to the level of rents, I will be setting the framework and policy within which the new social housing rent panel will operate. That will be subject to Assembly scrutiny. The panel will be an advisory body that will set annual rent levels within the overall policy framework based around the fundamental principles of affordability and sustainability. The social housing reform programme will develop the details of how the panel will be established and the parameters in which it will operate.

The Member is, I presume, also referring to the fact that, in general, housing association rents are a bit higher than Housing Executive rents. However, look, for example, at the cost to those 9,000 people living in houses with no cavity walls and no cavity wall insulation. Look at the amount of money they are spending on fuel to produce heat that is going out through the walls. Set that against any modest rent increase, and you will see that they would probably be in a better financial position than they are at the moment. Good housing that is structurally energy efficient and cuts costs is bound to be for the good of tenants. That is the direction in which we need to move.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will he detail for the House the current subvention from the Northern Ireland block grant to the Housing Executive?

Mr McCausland: In subvention to the Housing Executive, in 2012-13, the total funding provided from the Northern Ireland block grant is £307 million. Excluding the funding that relates to the programmes administered on behalf of DSD, the SHDP, grants, etc, the net subvention to the Housing Executive is around £75 million this year. Rental income this year is around £270 million, and, with annual increases of retail price index (RPI) plus 1%, which is the norm, rents collectable increases by about £10 million each year. That is the current level of subvention to the Housing Executive.

Schools: Area Planning

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar an obair phleanáil ceantair atá déanta go data agus soiléiriú a dhéanamh ar an bhealach a ba mhian liom an próiseas a chur chun cinn le linn an trasdula i dtreo ÚSO. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the area planning work that has been undertaken to date and set out how I intend to move the process forward during the transition towards the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

In the delivery of public services, it is essential to plan for the future to ensure that provision is appropriate to best meet the needs of the population. We have a legacy of some 1,100 schools that were established along sectoral lines, without sufficient efforts to strategically plan the pattern of provision. In future, we need a planned network of educationally and financially sustainable schools that are capable of delivering the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework.

In September 2011, I commissioned the education and library boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the other sectors, to develop area plans based on meeting the future educational needs of our young people. That process was grounded in the Department's sustainable schools policy. Seo an chéad uair ar tugadh faoi phleanáil straitéiseach le haghaidh soláthar oideachais ar an scála seo. This is the first time that strategic planning for education provision has been undertaken on that scale. It was the first time that sectors had been asked to plan together. I wanted the planning authorities to set aside individual, sectoral or institutions' needs and focus on how, as a society, we could best provide for the needs of all children and young people in an area.

The sustainable schools policy sets out the minimum number of pupils needed for schools to be deemed sustainable. Too many have focused on that minimum rather than on assessing the practicalities involved in delivering the entitlement framework as part of an education system that is fit for the 21st century. However, I have always made it clear, and I reiterate it now: area planning is not about budget cuts or school closures simply to save money. It is about strong, vibrant schools using the limited resources that we have, efficiently and effectively, to secure better outcomes for all children and young people. It is not about what is best for an institution; it is about what is best for pupils.

I turn now to the viability audit. To ensure there was a common understanding of the challenges facing education here, I believed that we needed to provide comprehensive information on each and every school. So, information on the quality of provision, enrolment levels and financial capability was drawn together for each school. They were known as the viability audits, which were published by the boards in March 2012.

For the first time, parents and the wider public had access to information about the level of pressure some schools were facing and would continue to face into the future. I think I can safely say that they sparked an important and, sometimes, heated debate. The audits were maligned in some quarters and misquoted or misused in others, but

they helped us all to understand the extent of the problems facing our education system and allowed informed debate and discussions, which would not have happened previously, to occur.

Going forward, I want to ensure that schools, parents and stakeholders continue to have that information available. I want to see the ongoing mature debate that is needed to deliver practical area solutions. Therefore, today, I am reporting that my Department will build on the viability audits. My officials will identify relevant, up-to-date information at school and area level on such issues as finance, enrolment and performance, and I will require the boards, and, subsequently, ESA, to publish that information annually, commencing in April of this year. That information will be designed to give the public a clear picture of the shape of education provision in their area.

I turn now to post-primary plans. I took receipt of the post-primary plans at the end of December 2012. That followed a public consultation exercise with almost 50,000 responses. That level of response is to be welcomed. There were individual responses from parents, pupils, school governors and staff, education sectoral bodies, elected representatives and the wider public. Some responses were petitions about saving individual schools that were perceived to be under threat, while others took a more strategic view about the vision for the future of our education system.

The consultation responses recognised the underlying issues and the need for change. However, I recognise that change is never easy. Overall, there was a desire for greater clarity on the proposals, more opportunity for engagement and greater consistency across the plans. There was a call for more innovative ideas and a willingness to explore more cross-sectoral solutions.

11.15 am

A LeasCheann Comhairle, in moving forward with area planning, we will endeavour to take those underlying themes on board. I take this opportunity to thank those who are responsible for the development of the plans. They sought to respond to the challenges that were laid down. My Department has assessed the draft area plans against the terms of reference and guidance. Although the plans do not totally meet the terms of reference that I set out, they do, in some areas, contain sound proposals. I regard them as the foundation on which to move forward.

Some areas of the plans are well developed. For example, there are firm proposals in Lurgan for amalgamations in the Catholic maintained sector. I know that many people have done a lot of soul-searching, and I am pleased to say that, by assessing the issues realistically, a very practical solution has been arrived at that is in the best interest of young people.

In Enniskillen, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) articulated a clear plan for the controlled and voluntary grammar sector. I have announced that that will now be advanced in planning. Again, with regard to the Western Board area, I confirm today that I am moving ahead with the Programme for Government (PFG) commitment to develop the Lisanelly site as a shared education campus and the area-planning solution for Omagh. I will inform the relevant schools' managing authorities that future investment in the Omagh area will be prioritised towards schools being built on the Lisanelly site.

Not surprisingly, there are many areas where there are a number of interrelated complexities to address. They will require a good deal more work to bring about an agreed solution.

An area-planning solution for west Belfast remains elusive. I find that unacceptable, particularly in the light of the most recent report into child poverty, which highlighted west Belfast as having the highest levels of child poverty. A proven way out of poverty is quality education. CCMS and the Commission for Catholic Education need to bring forward definitive plans that provide equality of access to quality education for all the children of west Belfast without further delay.

Also In Belfast, we are faced with a particular situation with the number of young people who currently travel into the city. Over 12,000 pupils travel into Belfast from other areas every day, and almost 10,000 of them come from the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) area. We need to ask ourselves whether that is what we want for the future. Is it sustainable economically, educationally and environmentally? I will commission a specific piece of work to look at that issue. I want all sectors to be involved. I want dialogue with schools and communities that will result in practical long-term solutions. The pattern of provision in the corridor between the South Eastern Board and the Belfast Board areas is an area on which I believe that more focused and detailed work is required. I will also ask the relevant boards to give that immediate attention.

With regard to the next steps, I have written today to the chairpersons of the boards and CCMS outlining the Department's views on each of the area plans and setting out how I plan to move forward. I have also directed that the plans that were submitted to me in December 2012 should be made available to the public on the boards' websites.

I have highlighted specifically a number of areas where I wish to see action. They include, for all boards, further development of a single approach to area planning and the presentation and content of the area plans; introduction of an appropriate mechanism to facilitate active engagement between all sectors to ensure that each has the opportunity to influence the proposals; and development of an action plan to deal with the specific priority areas and to address gaps in the area plans.

Planning to plan is not enough. We need to build on the achievements to date and to maintain the momentum on area planning. The time for endless discussion is over. It is now time for decisions.

As we move towards ESA, my Department will provide clarity and leadership on area planning. In the coming weeks, my officials will work closely with each board and CCMS on the details of their area plans and on where further work is needed.

To co-ordinate and oversee the continuing development of area plans, I will establish an area-planning steering group to be chaired by the deputy permanent secretary. The group's work programme will be aimed at filling the gaps in the current draft plans, embedding a single approach to area planning and identifying priority areas for action in the short to medium term. Membership of the group will

include the controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium sectors.

The primary area plans that I commissioned were received in my Department at the end of January 2013. I have directed that they be released for consultation on 19 March, with an extended consultation period open until the end of June. That will allow for wide-ranging discussion. My intention is that dialogue at local level, taking on board the lessons learned in the post-primary process, will result in more practical and sustainable solutions, including the potential, where appropriate, for increased sharing of accommodation and resources. I am also conscious that my response to the recently published independent review of the common funding scheme is likely to impact on primary school planning in the medium to long term. However, I am clear that we cannot delay. We must press ahead with planning in the primary sector.

We must ensure that our primary education sector can continue to demonstrate its ability to perform at the highest international level, as illustrated by the recent progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS) and trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS) report. That means that we need to ensure that our schools are focused on quality of teaching and learning, not struggling to survive.

Change of this scale needs to be managed, and we will continue to take account of the constraints on recurrent and capital budgets that we are facing in the coming years. School budgets need to be used to maximise the impact for the benefit of children and young people.

I have made clear that the new school building programme needs to support strong, vibrant schools that are capable of delivering high-quality education long into the future. My recent announcements on the school building programme have been grounded in the principles of area planning and the work done to date. Investment will continue to be targeted at proposals where there is clarity and agreement on the shape of area provision. I will say to managing authorities, schools and their communities that it is now time to look to the future. Protracted debate and avoidance of decision-making will mean delayed or no investment.

Area plans for special schools were submitted to my Department in February 2012. Some of the plans included special units alongside the consideration of dedicated special school facilities. That made it difficult to determine an overall regional picture of the highly specialised facilities needed to support our most vulnerable children. The plans also predated the finalisation of the special educational needs review. I have decided that we need a co-ordinated regional assessment of future need for dedicated special schools. Therefore, I am commissioning the development of a regional plan for those schools, which will aim to be completed within six months of the commencement date.

A Cheann Comhairle, mar fhocal scoir, creidim go bhfuil réadú atá ag méadú go bhfuil athrú ag tástail agus ag tarlú. There is a growing realisation that change is needed and is happening. Area planning is the key to securing the changes needed to make our education system capable of competing with and, hopefully, exceeding the achievements of the best in the world. To make that happen, we need to be progressive and forward-thinking. Most of all, we need to show leadership. That means leadership at every level. We need to set aside any form of self-interest and put the interests of all our children and young people at the centre of the process. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Craig: I listened with interest to the Minister's statement. He referred several times to the viability audit that took place. Has he absolutely confirmed in his mind that the information in that audit is 100% accurate? There is some anecdotal information that suggests that false targets were set for some schools, which put them into stress in the audit when, in reality, only around 25 post-primary schools are in stress. Does the Minister concede that there may be issues around the accuracy of the audit?

Mr O'Dowd: I cannot comment on the accuracy of the audits because they have not been published. They will be published in April. However, I assure the Member that a robust process will be put in place to check the authenticity of the information in the documents. The viability audit that was published previously was proof-checked with the schools involved. I understand that all the documents were passed by the schools and managing authorities before they were published. I am aware of one or two cases in which schools questioned documents following their publication. Doubts were cast about some of the information. However, that was only in one or two cases that were brought to my attention.

I assure the Member that we will liaise with the Education Committee on the information that will be published in the documents. I am not fixated on the title "viability audits", as that may thrown up the wrong assumptions about what the document is about. We will choose an appropriate title and check with the Education Committee what information it believes should be contained in it and how that information should be validated, etc. We will move forward from there.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement to the House. I especially welcome his commitment to examine the ongoing practice of bussing more than 10,000 pupils from the south-eastern region in and out of Belfast each day. For seven years, I was one of those pupils, and I know only too well how long a school day can be when you are required to travel on four or five buses a day just to get to and from school. Moreover, given that many of our inner-city communities suffer from educational underachievement, that practice of feeding the proliferation of selective schools in Belfast is definitely not benefiting the communities they are there to serve. Will the Minister give a commitment to look at that when he moves forward with the focused work on this issue?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. When we look at the information about inner-city Belfast and at where some of the selective schools are placed, it is clear that they are not benefiting the local communities around them.

As you put it, 10,000 pupils from the South Eastern Education and Library Board area and 12,000 pupils in total are bussed into Belfast every day to attend school. Now, it is a major city and you would expect a certain amount of flow into it. However, questions have been asked about whether some of the selective schools are in the right place in the greater Belfast area, or whether they should go to where the main draw of their catchment is. I am not answering those questions. They have been posed

to me, and we need to put in a mechanism that will bring us to the answers and how we move forward in the future.

Clearly, in education provision in inner Belfast, I have posed the question about west Belfast, but that question could also be asked of north Belfast. What is being done to ensure that those who live in inner-city Belfast or in socially deprived areas are gaining access high-quality schools? The area plans do not answer those questions, but I believe that the answers are easily accessible.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for a very welcome statement. There is much in it that we have been calling for, but I particularly welcome the, as he put it, "more opportunity for engagement". Despite the consultation process getting lots of answers, there is a still a mass of parents and teachers who do not know what is going on. When we get to the steering group, which I welcome, how will he make sure that it actually listens to principals and teachers, those who are not on it and, particularly, the voluntary grammars as well?

Mr O'Dowd: The role of the steering group is to examine the plans as they are currently formatted and to see how we can close the gaps in those plans. If there are dramatic changes to the plans as a result of those further discussions, and in circumstances where firmer proposals come out, there will be a need for consultation. However, in even the exercise of getting the plans in to shape, there will be a need for further discussion with local communities, schools and community leaders in those areas — whether that be informal or formal discussions around these matters. The key point that we have to get to is the decision-making. I emphasise again that future investment will be made in areas where decisions are made. Protracted conversations and the avoidance of decision-making is not the way forward for this matter.

There are lessons to be learned from the post-primary area planning process and from how the boards conducted the consultation process. I want this to be more hands on, and I want communities, school leaders and community and political leaders to be involved. That will not necessarily be a simple paper exercise; it has to be face to face as often as possible. I also want people to involve themselves not in the needs of individual schools, but in what it says on the tin. This is about area plans; let us discuss the educational needs of areas, rather than bogging ourselves down with the needs of individual schools.

11.30 am

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note his concern about "finance, enrolment and performance" and that he does not want children travelling around the country. I also note that he met the UN representative on the rights of the child recently. Will he reassure me that rural children, families and communities will have the same access to education services that is enjoyed by their urban counterparts as area planning progresses?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member of that, and he will note that my sustainable schools policy was rural-proofed. Any future policies or decisions that flow will also be rural-proofed.

I am glad that he mentioned my meeting with the Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The meeting with that gentleman, who has since given a speech to representatives of the community in Belfast, was very informative. There is a responsibility on us all to ensure that the commitments of the UN rights of the child are delivered, and I ask all parties to examine their own positions and policies to ensure that they are in line with the recommendations of the UN Rights of the Child Committee.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for his statement, towards the start of which is the interesting line that he wants:

> *"the planning authorities to set aside individual sectoral or institution needs".*

Yet, from this process so far, it is hard to draw any conclusion other than it will be an exercise in area planning within existing sectors. Is the Minister prepared to give a commitment that, in the right circumstances, the Department will honour its obligation to encourage and facilitate the integrated sector and will actively consider that model, if it is the best option, taking into account parental preference and all other considerations?

Mr O'Dowd: I will defend robustly anywhere that my Department has stood up to its responsibilities to facilitate and promote the integrated education sector. However, as the Member said, it is a sector: can he guarantee me that, when the integrated sector goes into a room as a member of the steering group that I will set up, it will discuss education in its totality rather than the needs of the integrated sector? Will the Irish-medium sector go in and simply discuss its needs? Will the boards or indeed the CCMS go in with the same approach?

In my view, they are responsible enough to go into that steering group and discuss education needs in their totality and present their points of view on education. However, when it comes down to the planning and decision-making, I believe that all the sectors that will be represented around that table are more than capable of looking at the picture holistically, of ensuring that we come forward with plans that meet the needs of our education system in its totality and of placing a greater emphasis on sharing within education.

One of the reasons that I have established the steering group is that I am not satisfied that enough account was taken of all sectors' needs during the previous process. The Irish-medium sector and the integrated sector had lobbied me heavily to be on the previous body. I did not agree with them at that stage; but when I reflect on the current area plans, I believe that there is a need for them to be on the next steering group. They will be represented there, but as educationalists to bring forward area plans and not just to speak about the needs of their individual sectors.

Lord Morrow: The Minister talks in his statement about three actions points, the second of which is to craft an inclusive consultation process. He goes on to tell us that this inclusive process:

> *"will include the controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium sectors".*

Where does the voluntary grammar sector sit in this inclusive process?

Mr O'Dowd: I have not ruled out the inclusion of the voluntary grammar sector. The question that I have not answered —

Lord Morrow: You did not rule it in.

Mr O'Dowd: You have the answer as well as the question? You are brilliant. You have the answer as well as the question. Had I known that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: — If I had known that, I could have done without making the statement — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister will resume his seat. I have to tell both of you to make your remarks through the Chair, please.

Mr O'Dowd: I was just saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, that if I had known that, I could have stayed at home and he could have made the statement, asked the questions and answered them.

I have not included the voluntary grammar sector because of the question of who represents it in planning at an area-based level.

Mr Allister: The Governing Bodies Association (GBA).

Mr O'Dowd: Does it? The Member is hinting to me that it is the GBA. If the voluntary grammar sector comes back to me and confirms that the GBA can act as its representative body in discussions on the totality of education, I will certainly take that into consideration. However, I want to be assured that those bodies that will sit around the table are there to represent the sector that they say they will represent and will enter those discussions based on the needs of education in its totality. So, let us have that discussion. I have no difficulty with having that discussion or that confirmation. I have not ruled them out. You are right that they are not on the list, but I have not ruled them out.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. Does he agree with me on what can be achieved by area planning? We only have to look at the unique achievements in the Strabane schools estate, with the amalgamation of the town's two post-primary schools and the ongoing amalgamation of some of the primary schools. That is one of the best examples of area planning being tried, tested and proven to work for the educational provision of our young people in Strabane. It is a good model for going forward. Does the Minister agree with that?

Mr O'Dowd: I think Strabane is a very good example of how area planning can and should work. It has not been an easy journey for either the controlled sector or the maintained sector in Strabane in reaching the decisions that they have made, but they have reached those decisions. They have made firm decisions on the way forward. The maintained sector has moved forward with the newbuild facility at Holy Cross College, and it is moving forward from strength to strength. The controlled sector is now moving forward as well. I have confirmed that its schools will move forward with area planning. A new school will be built, which will service the needs of the entire community in the Strabane area.

That is proof, is proof were needed, that area planning can work, and area planning will be backed up by the Minister and the Department with future investment. There are other examples, such as in Lurgan, where schools are coming together. Again, there were difficult and emotional discussions, but people have made the right decisions about the future of education in the area, and it can be done. I say to other areas that, when they are in doubt, they should look around for other examples of where it is working. Strabane is a fine example of where it is working.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister has made his statement, and I certainly heard a lot of words, but, unfortunately, not a lot of substance. Nonetheless, will the Minister detail a timeline of the next steps that he referred to in the statement? He said that we need to set aside any form of self-interest. Does that include the Minister?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, it does include the Minister. I am open and frank with the House. If I had the legislative ability — I assume that you are referring to academic selection — I would bring a proposal to the House to have the phased removal of academic selection, similar to that proposed by the previous Minister, Caitríona Ruane, over a three-year period. I would bring that forward. I am not going to get agreement on that at this stage, but that does not stop me working away to persuade people to move away from academic selection.

Area planning, however, is not simply about academic selection, although academic selection does have an impact on it. We have talked about the 12,000 people travelling into Belfast, the needs of the controlled sector and the needs of the maintained sector, and stuck in the middle of that is a group of voluntary grammar schools, which need to be facilitated. I will find out how we can facilitate them, but they also need to play their part in area planning and engage with the educational partners around them. Everyone has to have a bit of give and take in relation to how we move forward with area planning. My position not being achieved does not stop area planning moving forward. Others' positions not being achieved will not stop area planning moving forward.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Given that area plans for special schools were submitted a year ago, why has it taken so long for the announcement of a regional assessment? Are children in special schools being left behind?

Mr O'Dowd: No, I do not believe that they are being left behind. We are quite lucky that our special schools estate is delivering a very good service to our young people. I introduced special needs area planning because I wanted to find out about the initial landscape of it. I used that initial plan to make a number of decisions about capital builds in relation to area planning around special needs facilities. I made a decision on a special needs school in Ballymena and one in west Belfast, the St Gerard's Educational Resource Centre, etc. So, the information has been used, but further work needs to be done as regards our special needs schools. We need to look at it on a regional basis.

The previous document that looked at special needs schools looked at units at schools, etc. I want a more focused piece of work around our special needs schools, because there is a wide travel distance for our young people travelling to some of the special needs schools.

I want to use this opportunity to wish all the young people who were, thankfully, not seriously injured in the crash this morning near Downpatrick, all the best. I understand from the latest reports that the majority of the young people are OK. The driver is shook up but, thankfully, no one was seriously injured in that accident. I wish them all the best.

No one has been left behind in area planning. I have made investments, and I want to ensure that the next piece of work that we do is more focused and more strategic.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his update, and I welcome the fact that there has been a large number of respondents to the consultation. It is clear that those voices need to be heard.

In his statement, the Minister said:

> *"There was a call for more innovative ideas and a willingness to explore more cross-sectoral solutions."*

He also said:

> *"My Department has assessed the draft area plans against the terms of reference and guidance. Although the plans do not totally meet the terms of reference that I set out, in some areas, they contain sound proposals. I regard them as the foundation on which to move forward."*

Does the Minister agree that the reference to looking at cross-border solutions has not been adhered to and that much more work needs to be done by the managing authorities to assess the opportunities that lie in our education sector there? Will he outline to the House how those opportunities can be delivered, particularly in places with particular needs such as rural County Fermanagh?

Mr O'Dowd: I agree with the Member. I do not believe that the cross-border element of the terms of reference has been fully achieved. There remains potential for cross-border planning of our schools estate to benefit people on both sides of the border. I want the steering group to look at that as a specific piece of work. We continue to have discussions at the North/South Ministerial Council with Minister Ruairí Quinn on those matters to see how we can move that process forward.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. As he is very much aware, there is a strong lobby for new schools in the Holywood area. I see that there are proposals for further discussions on the corridor between the South Eastern Education and Library Board and the Belfast Education and Library Board areas. Will the Holywood newbuilds be included in those discussions?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes; in general, I see the Holywood newbuilds being part of those discussions. I will meet you and a delegation from Holywood in a number of weeks' time to further discuss those matters.

As I said previously to you and to representatives of the schools, we need a firm decision in that area, so that I, as Minister, can make a proposal on the way forward. I need decisions in the local area and a confirmed area plan for the area, which has to take into account the flow into Belfast and vice versa. There is a bit more work to be done in that regard, but I look forward to the discussions with you and representatives from the area, which will assist us in moving forward towards an agreed pathway for the Holywood area.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he referred to the post-primary sector in Fermanagh. Where does the responsibility for the proposals lie and who will make the final decisions on their progress? Does it lie with the Department, the Western Education and Library Board or the schools' boards of governors?

Mr O'Dowd: That depends on the sector. If you are referring to the controlled sector, I can say that the decisions will rest with the relevant education and library board. Decisions for the maintained sector will rest with the maintained sector. Those bodies will have to be included in the discussions on the way forward for the area planning process. That will be the deciding factor in signing off on area plans.

I made an announcement about the controlled sector in Fermanagh. I made that decision on the basis of proposals that were brought forward by the Western Education and Library Board. I agreed that those proposals were the best way forward for the controlled sector in the Fermanagh area, and they are progressing through planning.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the announcement of a new school build at Glenwood Primary School in my constituency.

The Minister mentioned west Belfast in his statement but the problems that he acknowledged apply equally in north Belfast. There are major socio-economic problems right across the constituency. Will he take urban constituencies such as North Belfast into consideration and will his steering group, when it reports to him, consider working with groups such as Integrated Services for Children and Young People in the greater Shankill area to get a viable solution to the problems that face many young people across the constituency?

Mr O'Dowd: You are right. I emphasised west Belfast in my statement as an example of where decisions need to be made. Those decisions can be brought together more easily in urban areas than in rural communities, where there are longer travelling distances etc. However, we have instances in west Belfast — I will come to north Belfast in a second — of schools looking at each other across the roads and of schools on the one site divided by a fence. To me, not much area planning is required to bring a resolution to that issue.

11.45 am

I agree with the Member about North Belfast. I have received representations from representatives of North Belfast and the Shankill area about how we should move forward on the educational attainment of the young people in that area. That will take community involvement and the involvement of the education board and the Department. I am happy to play my part in all that as well. I am more than happy for the voices of the representative bodies in that area, which the Member referred to, to be heard as part of an area-planning process. Indeed, they need to be heard as part of that process.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. In the statement, he made reference to a number of plans in particular board areas. However, he did not mention the North Eastern Education and Library Board, which is a board that has progressed with more specific proposals than others. I imagine that the Minister has received a huge response to the proposals for schools in the Magherafelt area. Will he give us an insight into his thoughts on the way forward in the Magherafelt area? Does he recognise that there has been a lack

of engagement that is resulting in increased anxiety in schools?

Mr O'Dowd: The danger of using examples in a speech is that you may leave others out. My speech was between 15 and 20 minutes long, and I thought that it was long enough. If I left board areas out, it does not mean that they do not have good examples. I recognise the work on area planning that the North Eastern Education and Library Board has conducted. Indeed, some of the capital announcements that I made previously were as a result of the work that the North Eastern Education and Library Board conducted.

I am not going to give my views on the Magherafelt area, because continuing work is required on that. However, I will encourage the Member, as an elected representative of the area, to ensure that the decision process moves forward and that she uses her influence. Decisions need to be made in the Magherafelt area, particularly on the controlled sector and what provision will look like in the future. It is an area that the steering group will have to look at. As I said, it is one of those areas in which I want decisions to be made. There is still work to be done there, but it does not need to be protracted or long ended. People need to make decisions; that is the key to success. It is not up to me to tell that local area from afar what the solution is. It needs to come together, make the decision and present the rationale for that decision to me, as Minister.

Mr Allister: The Minister is on record saying that, although area planning itself does not have a stated purpose of ending academic selection, it will contribute to changing the educational landscape in such a way as to make academic selection more irrelevant. Will the Minister, therefore, tell the House frankly how important a tool area planning is to him in liquidating academic selection? Is that his real driver in area planning? Will he be frank and candid with the House about that?

Mr O'Dowd: I thought that I was frank and candid with Mr McCrea when he asked me a similar question. I am on record saying that, if I believed that legislation for a phased removal of academic selection, which my predecessor, Caitríona Ruane, promoted, would pass through the Assembly, I would bring it to the Assembly. However, I know that we will not achieve consensus on that.

Is area planning the key to removing academic selection? No, it is not. However, I believe that the more that people discuss education and the more that educational partners in the one area come together, the more irrelevant academic selection becomes. You can then provide excellent education across a range of schools, or in one school, without the need for selecting and rejecting children at 11 years of age. I do not distance myself at all from the remarks that you attributed to me. I assure the Member that area planning is not some sort of clandestine method for me to remove academic selection. However, I believe that its outcomes, the discussions with educationalists and the realisation that you do not need academic selection for educational excellence will come to reality.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before calling the next Member, I will say that there is too much noise coming from the Benches. Please take private conversations outside. I call Mr Mervyn Storey.

Mr Storey: In his statement, the Minister refers to sectors, as other Members have done this morning. Will the Minister tell the House when CCMS will be brought into the tent or told to stay outside it? Quite clearly, the controlled sector has had enough.

Today, the Minister announced that, in March, he will progress with the area plans for primary schools. In the past 10 years, 50 controlled primary schools have closed, of which 19 were maintained schools. Ten controlled secondary schools have closed, of which three were maintained schools. No voluntary grammars have closed.

I say to the Minister and the House today that the purge on the controlled sector must come to an end. As the DUP spokesperson, I make it clear that that will have to be the case.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member please ask a question?

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give the House a clear indication and an assurance that CCMS's cavalier attitude to area planning will come to an end?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not recognise the claim that CCMS has a cavalier attitude to area planning. It is in the tent. If you want to ensure that your facilities and estate are upgraded or replaced, you have to be involved in area planning. If you are not there, I am not building. It is as simple as that.

To talk about the number of school closures is to have the wrong debate. If the Member can point me to any schools that I have closed in my tenure that I should have kept open, that is the debate that we should be having. If a school can no longer provide the education necessary to facilitate the curriculum and the achievement of first-class, world-class education systems, I am of the view that it should be closed. That is the harsh reality. For a public representative to say that a facility should be closed may be a difficult concept to grasp, but if it is the wrong facility in the wrong place, it should be closed. I do not buy into the numbers game that there have been 50 closures here and none there.

One of the methods used for primary schools and, indeed, post-primary schools by the maintained sector has been to amalgamate schools. The Department does not necessarily register the amalgamation of primary schools and of post-primary schools as a closure, although it is, in effect, the closure of one of the schools when they amalgamate on one site.

I will not play the numbers game that says that if I have to close a controlled school, I will look for a maintained school and an integrated school to close. I may be tempted to look for a voluntary grammar school, but that is a different story.

The Member makes a serious point: the voluntary grammar sector will have to include itself. I refer to Mr Morrow's comment, and we will see how we facilitate it in the discussions. Whether it be the non-selective sector in the maintained sector or the controlled sector, it should not be taking all the hits. It is everybody's responsibility to ensure that we have a sustainable schools estate.

Miss M McIlveen: On reading the statement, I was curious about the piece of work that the Minister is commissioning on the number of pupils travelling from the South Eastern Board area to Belfast and, in particular, how that may limit

the parental choice of my constituents. Having listened to his response to Mr Hazzard, I am speechless, and that does not happen very often. The Minister is suggesting that well-established schools in Belfast may be in the wrong location. Is the Minister telling the House that he is planning to move those schools and, if so, at what cost?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not know why the Member is speechless, considering that the population flows out of Belfast, and so on. Over the years, it has been decided that well-established hospitals in Belfast were in the wrong place. The fact that a school has existed in point A for a number of years does not mean that it has to continue to exist on that spot. That is particularly the case if it is drawing pupils from a geographical area beyond Belfast. Why are we congesting our roads by driving pupils to school and why are we spending hundreds of thousands — perhaps millions — of pounds bussing children to schools in Belfast when those schools could be built at another location that is more accessible to the draw of pupils?

However, I have no answer to any of those questions. I said in my statement that I am commissioning work that will have to include the schools that already exist in Belfast — the well-established schools that the Member refers to. Their views will have to be taken on the matter. I cannot tell the voluntary grammar schools where to place themselves. I cannot tell them where to be rebuilt. However, we can have a conversation with them about where the best place is for them to exist in the future.

Some of the schools have already asked themselves this question: where do we see ourselves geographically 10, 15 and 20 years done the line, serving education? They are already asking themselves that question. This piece of work will be valuable, not only to the Department but to those schools as well.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Tuigim go bhfuil an plean ceantair do dheisceart Ard Mhacha socraithe cheana féin. D'ardaigh mé cheana féin leis an Aire an gá atá le hinfheistíocht a dhéanamh i scoil Naomh Iosaf i gCrois Mhic Lionnáin.

I thank the Minister for his statement. I understand that the area plan for south Armagh is well settled, and I have already raised with the Minister the need for investment in St Joseph's High School in Crossmaglen.

There is little reference in the Minister's statement to progress being made in many areas of the region, outside of two or three. Four years after the 'Together Towards Entitlement' report was published, is he confident that the steering group that he will establish will move the process on at any greater rate? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. I announced that I would be bringing forward the area planning process in September 2011. The group first got together in February 2012, so the work has been going on for about a year in real terms. At times, progress has been slower than I would have wished it to be and it has been frustrating. However, there has been progress.

This is not the best way to plan going into the future: we are dealing with five education and library boards, CCMS, the Irish-medium sector, the integrated sector and the voluntary sector. I hope that I have not left anybody out of that list. So, we have to get all of those people to work together and, for the first time in their collective histories, agree an area plan. Underneath that, you have 1,100 schools, all of which have an opinion about themselves — and rightly so — and believe that they should be the core school in their area and be maintained at all costs. So, you have to deal with all that and try to develop a plan.

So, we have made progress. I mentioned to one of the other Members that I have listed, as an example, areas of progress in some of the board areas. There are other areas that I can list as examples, but the overall picture has been that more work needs to be done on area planning.

Will the steering group move that forward? Yes, it will. The steering group will move it forward until the establishment of ESA, and then ESA will take responsibility for area planning. Area planning is going to be a continuous process of moving towards a sustainable schools estate.

On the issue of different versions of the plans and moving forward, there may be a couple of years' more work in this. However, at each stage, you will be able to examine the plans and make definitive statements about certain areas. I have done that: if you look at my capital builds announcement, I used area planning as the tool for deciding where new capital builds would be. As area plans move forward again, and when there is more money available for capital investment, we will look at them to see where capital investment should be. In terms of the school enhancement programme, which I recently announced, area planning will be the tool used to decide where that money should be spent as well.

So, it is an ongoing piece of work. As with many things in this society, things do not always move as quickly as they could.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement. In reference to the educational campus in Omagh, can the Minister state whether the area-planning template matches the terms of reference of the Department? Can he assure us that all of the schools are positively engaged? What is the timescale for the consummation and development of the project?

Mr O'Dowd: I confirmed this morning that the area planning solution for Omagh is Lisanelly, and that my future investments in the Omagh area will be in the Lisanelly site. As I mentioned to you during the Adjournment debate a number of nights ago, there has been a very democratic system. There has been local consultation, the council in the area has debated this and supports the Lisanelly project, the local representatives in the area support it, the Assembly supports it and it is a Programme for Government target that I intend to achieve. So, it is one of those areas where there has been enough discussion: it is now time to move forward. As I said to you in the debate the other night, I am looking at a variety of ways to fund that project, and a number of international partners may be willing to provide some funding towards it.

All those aspects are going forward. I confirmed this morning that the decision on area planning for Omagh has been made: Lisanelly is the only show in town.

12.00 noon

Executive Committee Business

Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

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

That the draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

I will briefly set out the background to the draft order. The proposed legislation is necessary to update the list of not-for-profit public bodies that are subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG). Since 2008, when the original legislation was made, a number of new not-for-profit companies have been created, and some companies that were previously listed have been dissolved or transferred out of public sector ownership. Hence, there is a need to revise the list of bodies to take account of those changes.

The new legislation will permit the Comptroller and Auditor General to report on as well as certify the accounts of the relevant bodies, providing scope for him to comment more widely on matters pertaining to the bodies in question. That ties into the general legislative framework for other audits and provides for stronger accountability. I commend the order to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister set out, this is a straightforward piece of legislation. The purpose of the order is to amend the list of not-for-profit public companies to be subject to annual audit by the C&AG from that set out in the Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order 2008. The proposal noted that the opportunity is also being taken to enable the C&AG to report on as well as certify the accounts of the bodies to be subject to that legislation. It stated that that is in line with the general legislative framework for other audits and will provide greater capacity for the C&AG to issue a report without necessarily qualifying or modifying his or her audit opinion.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Committee agreed at its meeting that it had no objection to the policy proposals. The formal statutory rule before the Assembly was considered by the Committee together with the accompanying report from the Assembly's Examiner of Statutory Rules, and the Examiner raised no issues by way of technical scrutiny. The Committee, therefore, agreed to recommend that the draft order be approved by the Assembly.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat. I support the proposal.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman for keeping their remarks as brief as mine. It means that we can move on quickly from this business.

I thank the Committee for its work on the legislation. As I said to the House, the order is necessary because the list of bodies to be audited has changed over time. Some have been added, and some have been taken off. It gives additional powers. Someone asked me whether this means that the Northern Ireland Audit Office will get additional resources. The answer is "No. It will not get additional resources". However, I understand that the Audit Office is content that the additional work can be done within the existing generous budget that we already make available to that body. I commend the order to the Assembly and trust that it will have Members' support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Private Members' Business

Ad Hoc Committee: Parliament Buildings

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. As a valid petition of concern was presented on Monday 25 February in relation to the motion, the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Ms Ruane: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly approves the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to read a few quotes from the Good Friday Agreement:

> *"We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning."*
>
> *"Táimid tiomanta don chomhpháirtíocht, don chomhionannas agus don chomhurraim mar bhonn leis na caidrimh laistigh de Thuaisceart Éireann, idir an Tuaisceart agus an Deisceart, agus idir na hoileáin seo".*
>
> *"We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within [the North of Ireland], between North and South, and between these islands ... We acknowledge the substantial differences between our continuing, and equally legitimate, political aspirations ... affirm that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of [the North], the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities ... recognise the birthright of all the people of [the North] to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of [the North] ... All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in [the North], the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland ... All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division."*

Tagann na hailt seo ó Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta, agus tá roinnt mhaith eile cosúil leo. Ritheann an teanga chéana tríd: urraim, cearta, caoinfhulaingt, comhionannas, éagsúlacht, Éireannach, Briotanach. An bhfuil an réaltacht ag cur leis na focail? These are some of the quotes from the Good Friday Agreement. The language running through it is "respect", "rights", "tolerance", "equality", "diversity", "Irish" and "British". Does the reality match the words?

We have watched the hysterical reaction to the democratic decision of Belfast City Council, a compromise position in relation to the flag that does not afford equality to nationalists and republicans. Indeed, it is a mirror image of what happens in other councils, for which Members of the House voted in their capacity as councillors. We have listened to the weak excuses as the PSNI has failed to police illegal parades and illegal roadblocks and the intimidation of elected representatives. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: We have watched as a significant number of Members joined those illegal roadblocks. Thankfully, because of public pressure from beleaguered businesses and civic society, they have come off that — not before time. We have witnessed the failure of leadership from many on the Benches opposite over the past few months. One example of that failure of leadership was the motion put forward by the DUP to the Assembly Commission. It is a Commission that claims that it operates on consensus, it has a unionist majority, and, on June 2, 2002:

> *"The Commission agreed that the flags issue is a political issue best handled by the Assembly."*

Putting forward this motion is a political stunt by the DUP. The DUP, before Christmas, was calling for a forum to discuss the issue of flags and identity. Today, it has tabled a petition of concern to block the establishment of such a forum. It seems to me that both unionist parties are letting themselves be led by illegal, antidemocratic protesters like Bryson and Frazer, instead of trying to come at the issue in a sensible, mature way. This is 2013, not 1913.

Is é an cur chuige daonlathach plé agus vóta a dhéanamh sa Tionól, ach feictear go bhfuil eagla ar an DUP agus ar an UUP — agus níl a lán den UUP anseo — roimh dhíospóireacht sa Tionól.

The democratic approach would be for the discussion and vote to take place in the Assembly, but the DUP and UUP are afraid, it would appear, to have the debate in the Assembly. Who is afraid of democracy? Why would anyone be afraid of the establishment of an ad hoc group to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly? As Assembly Members, we have a duty of care —

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. She goes on at great length to elaborate on the cowardice of the DUP and the Ulster Unionists on the issue. Would she like to tell the House why her party and her colleagues in the SDLP have consistently boycotted the Commission meetings? Would you like to elaborate on that?

Ms Ruane: I thank the Member for his comment. First, I say to him that his party should have no fear of democracy and equality. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: The place for discussion of flags, symbols and emblems is the Chamber, not the Assembly Commission. The UUP knows that, and where are its members today? Where are they in defence of their wonderful democratic position? Where are they? I see a lone presence in the Chamber. The least they could do is to come out and defend their undemocratic position in relation to this. Even at this stage, I call on the parties opposite to support the setting up of an Ad Hoc Committee, to look at the principles that I read out from this agreement. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: They are basic, fundamental principles. Who is afraid of democracy? Why should anyone be afraid of the establishment of an ad hoc group?

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: I will, yes.

Mr Storey: The Member asks, "Who is afraid of democracy?". If the party opposite is so keen on democracy, will she tell this House why it absents itself from the Mother of Parliaments at Westminster? It takes salaries, money and all the benefits, but it does not go to the most democratic forum in the United Kingdom.

Ms Ruane: That is a typical deflection tactic from Mr Storey. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Storey: Answer.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I will not deign to give an answer to that deflection. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Ms Ruane: Let us talk about the issues here, in this part of Ireland. Let us talk about the agreement. Let us talk about the agreements that we have reached as political parties. Let us talk —

Mr Storey: We did not sign up to that —

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: See this nonsense that "We have not signed up to the Good Friday Agreement"? It is another pretence to their electorate. You signed up to power sharing, North/South, the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have a debate across the Chamber.

Ms Ruane: So, let us not pretend that you do not support these institutions. The difficulty is that you want to cherry-pick what you do in these institutions.

I say to the Members opposite that, as Assembly Members, we have a duty of care to employees in this Building and, to date, the Assembly Commission has failed in that duty. Some of the staff in this Building have come to me saying that they feel that their traditions and identity have not been respected and they do not work in a neutral environment — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — and they feel discriminated against.

Mr Storey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you allow a situation where a Member refers to members of staff in this House? I ask the Speaker to rule on this issue. I ask the Member to withdraw the remark, which is scurrilous. It is a very dangerous position for any Member to place members of staff in.

Mr Speaker: On the point of order, there is a mechanism outside the Chamber if staff have a problem with the Building. I advise Members to be careful and caution them against drawing staff into a political situation. I warn all Members of the House to be very careful in what they say. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Ruane: I think it is very important that, in our duty of care, we ensure that all members of staff work in a neutral environment or an equal environment. The current environment is not neutral, and it is not equal. Their views need to be listened to and acted on. It is very important that all traditions are respected in the House and in the Building. Do I and the people who voted for me feel that our identity is cherished, that we have parity of esteem and that our ethos and identity are respected?

12.15 pm

Mr Storey: National insurance number?

Ms Ruane: Even as I ask the question, I am being interrupted rudely. We come up Prince of Wales Avenue; we come past Carson's statue; we come in under Britannia's lions — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: Poppies are sold at every entrance during November, yet our national flag is not flown and our Irish language is not given the place that it deserves. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: Our symbols, such as the Easter lily, are not given parity of esteem.

Mr Storey: War symbols.

Ms Ruane: You see, there is more rudeness from across the Chamber. There is more rudeness, because they do not want to listen to the message.

Mr Clarke: I do not want to listen to you.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: Well, there you go. I will ask the Speaker to rule on that. It is my right to speak here, and if you do not want to listen to me —

Mr Speaker: Order. Members need to be mindful of their language in the Chamber. It is a democratic institution. I should not have to remind Members where they are. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I respect the right of people in the unionist community to have their heroes, symbols and emblems, but I expect that respect to be reciprocated.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Ms Ruane: The days of forcing one flag on everyone are well and truly over. When are they going to stop ignoring

people's views? I urge all parties to vote for this proposal. Who is afraid of democracy? Sinn Féin is not. Bring it on.

Mr Campbell: The issue of establishing or not establishing an Ad Hoc Committee to deal with the issues that the Member mentioned needs to be looked at in the context of where we are. The Sinn Féin Member for South Down said that these issues should be dealt with in the Chamber, yet the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee would not mean that they are dealt with in the Chamber; they would be dealt with in the way in which other issues are dealt with in Ad Hoc Committees — outside the Chamber. However, let us come to the central core of —

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Ms Ruane: Actually, it would be dealt with in the Chamber. In the first instance, it would be dealt with by all parties sitting round a table in an Ad Hoc Committee, and a full report would then be brought to the Chamber.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Campbell: Getting an extra minute is at least some good from the intervention, Mr Speaker.

So, as she has just confirmed, the Ad Hoc Committee would meet outside the Chamber, which negates what she said. That is almost pedantry. Let us get down to the core of the issue. It is really not conducive to good debate for the Member or anyone else to wave redundant documents from 15 years ago. That really is not conducive to where we are now and to the progress that we need to make for the future. We need to establish —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, everybody is looking to get in.

Mr Lyttle: I ask the Member sincerely to reflect on the comment about the Good Friday Agreement being redundant, given the huge democratic support that was given to that agreement across the whole island of Ireland.

Mr Campbell: The Member should have listened to what I was going to say. If we are talking about the underlying principles of integrity and respect and about some of the other issues that cover a range of documents, there is not an issue. The issue is the way in which that document was implemented over our heads and how it brought into a democratic forum those who advocated violence. That is the point that I was making. That issue is redundant, dealt with and, hopefully, will never come back again.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way.

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mr Eastwood: The Member talks again about a redundant document. DUP Members have shouted from their seats about the fact that the DUP did not support the Good Friday Agreement. Will the Member not accept here and now that the people of Ireland — North and South — voted overwhelmingly for the Good Friday Agreement?

Mr Campbell: I am glad that the Member put it like that. The people of the Irish Republic, in that country, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Belfast Agreement. Undoubtedly, that is the case. The position in Northern Ireland was completely different. Yes, there was a majority — 15 years ago. I do not know why people are obsessed with what happened 15 years ago. We are more interested in what happens today, tomorrow, next week, next month and next year. The position is that —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: No, I am running out of time to give way. It is not like me to be generous, but I have been very generous. I am not going to be any more.

The factual position in law is that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. I know that the Member for South Down does not like that and does not want that, but she has to accept that. That is the reality. It does not matter how many Ad Hoc Committees she wants established or how many votes she wants, because that is the reality. It is not going to change next week, next month, next year or any time in the future.

A reflection of that reality is that the flag of the United Kingdom flies in the Parliament of the United Kingdom in London. Some people referred to what happens in the Irish Parliament, and many Members talked about a document from 15 years ago. The flag of that country flies on that Parliament in Dublin regularly throughout the year, so, if the honourable Member for South Down wants parity of esteem for flags, I await the introduction in that Parliament with her colleagues of the dual flags of the union flag and the tricolour flying on Dáil Éireann. I have not heard anybody say that that would be a contribution towards Britishness and Irishness and the recognition of both identities. Nobody says that. Why? Because the process that the Member for South Down and some of her colleagues seem to be engaged in is a one-way process. In Northern Ireland, they want recognition of dual identities, but, in the Republic, it is a solo identity. I do not know why I am regarded as being hard line when I say that. That is the factual position, and the honourable Member cannot seem to accept it.

The Member for South Down referred to rights and responsibilities and to issues that flow from the integrity of these institutions. For once, in one small part of what she said, I agree with her. We also need to establish that, when it comes to the rights and responsibilities —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Campbell: — of others in the context of what we do here, everybody has to accept that a petition of concern has been tabled.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Campbell: We have stated where we stand, and we move on beyond this redundant piece of legislation.

Mr Cree: It is certainly heating up. It looks as though it will be a very interesting afternoon.

Flags, emblems, symbols and language are always emotive and sensitive issues in Northern Ireland. That is particularly the case in the current, often volatile situation that we have seen on the streets over the past number of months. We have seen the difficulty that the decision at Belfast City Council has caused, and I ask that the Assembly do not make the same mistake. The necessary consensus in all the issues must be sought and agreed before changes are made. This debate should be carried out with that in mind, and we in this House should set an example.

The Assembly Commission currently has clear responsibilities under section 40 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. That includes providing the Assembly with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly's purposes. During my time on the Commission, that role has included looking at issues such as flags, emblems, symbols and language in the context of our work in promoting equality of opportunity and the desirability of good relations.

I will just correct the proposer of the motion. The Commission comprises five members, and no one in the House would contend that the Alliance Party is a unionist party. The Commission is the proper place for this subject to be discussed. For that reason, I and my party are opposed to the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee. Why do we need a new way of dealing with these areas when we already have an appropriate mechanism? One must assume that the underlying reason for this motion is the ongoing flags issue. Certainly, the discussion so far supports that.

The Commission has attempted to meet on a number of occasions recently to progress this matter, with the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party, on two occasions, boycotting the meetings. If those parties are not prepared to discuss the issues within the context of Commission meetings, why should we expect any progress on an Ad Hoc Committee?

The situation with the flying of the Union flag at Stormont is straightforward: we do not have a designated day list that is consistent. For example, it appears that Belfast City Hall goes with the designated day list published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in London, which offers 18 designated days for Northern Ireland.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: Yes.

Mr Lyttle: Is the Member stating clearly today, therefore, that the Ulster Unionist Party is holding to its long-standing position of supporting designated days at Parliament Buildings at Stormont?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Cree: Thank you for that. You will have to wait for the answer.

Parliament Buildings at Stormont is governed by the list in the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 2000. That has 17 days, but, with the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and the Princess Margaret, we are now down to 15 days. It is the wish of my party, through the Commission, to look at how that anomaly can be rectified, because it is entirely inappropriate that the number of days is left to dwindle, as is happening.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: No.

A suggestion may be that the list used at Parliament Buildings is tied to the list used by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, or we can look at a Northern Ireland-specific approach. There is no reason why the Commission cannot deal with this. Indeed, a consultation is being drawn up along those lines.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: No.

I reiterate that my party is seeking to effect change that is fair through reaching a consensus. That is why it is so disappointing that others are not willing to participate through the usual forum. We are not seeking to push through a decision using a majority, as happened on Belfast City Council. We are also not seeking to go on a solo run, as David Ford attempted to do in the Justice Department with the stripping of the emblems of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. We are simply looking to consult on the best and fairest way forward.

As I said, my party is not willing to agree to the setting up of an Ad Hoc Committee of this nature. It is time-consuming and inappropriate, and the mechanism is already in place for discussion and debate. It is disappointing that, while the economy is still struggling and unemployment remains high, we are devoting so much time to flags and emblems.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member give way?

Mr Cree: No. Important and emotive as flags and emblems are, I think that the majority of people in Northern Ireland would rather that we found solutions to job creation, educational underachievement and housing issues.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion. For many weeks now, protests have been held across Northern Ireland about the flying of the Union flag at Belfast City Hall. The depth of feeling across the community about the issue shows that we have still not dealt sufficiently with the flags, symbols and emblems of the respective identities of so many people in Northern Ireland. To that end, as the SDLP member of the Assembly Commission, I welcome the motion to the House, which is the appropriate place to discuss the motion.

We are all here to lead, and this is what leading does, through the setting up of this ad hoc group — not just looking singly at flags but looking at emblems, symbols and a language strategy. A mature discussion by all should take place in the Chamber. That is how we demonstrate to those in the community and the outside world that the Assembly does not shy away from the difficult decisions and that we are capable of maintaining political recognition of the sensitive issues around flags, emblems and symbols.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. Clearly, the Member is talking about consensus, and I am sure we will move on to that. We have heard much about consensus in the Chamber. Very clearly, on Belfast City Council — I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council — there was no consensus on the flag. However, a majority of people in that chamber decided to drive through the policy. Your party clearly supports that majority in City Hall, but there is a consensus in the electorate to send a unionist majority here. You simply will not recognise the majority that resides here. I say to the Member, with the greatest respect, that in the City Hall vote your party voted in committee to remove the flag entirely, then shifted its position, led by Sinn Féin, to have designated days.

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for the intervention. The original motion that was tabled to the Assembly Commission is clearly watered down now. The predetermined outcome that was originally in the motion has been taken out. I maintain the case that it was the DUP, the Ulster Unionists and the Alliance Party that, on the original Assembly Commission, decided on the designated days. Go back to 2001. It was those same parties that, in 2001, decided on the setting up of an ad hoc group to look at flags, symbols and emblems. There is no difference between then and now. That is the best place to bring forward ideas and thoughts, and, reflecting on what Leslie Cree said, to bring about consensus. There was never going to be consensus on the original motion that was tabled by the DUP and the Ulster Unionists, because it was seen as trick and stunt politics. Those trick and stunt politics failed.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. I appreciate that the Member was not here 10 years or so ago, but he should be aware that the setting up of an Ad Hoc Committee was in a period when this was, essentially, a Secretary of State matter. Indeed, where it was a reserved or excepted matter, the format was that an Ad Hoc Committee would be set up, as was done for a number of other issues, such as criminal damage compensation. That is why an Ad Hoc Committee was established at that point to look at the issue of flags, not within Parliament Buildings but across all of Northern Ireland.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for the intervention. It was also the case that the DUP accepted the Northern Ireland order from the then Secretary of State on the designated days. That is what it accepted at the Assembly Commission. Then, when the tensions on the street were very high, the DUP tried to pull a stunt over the other parties in the House. That was not going to happen. The SDLP was certainly not going to be part of that.

Getting back to the motion, Mr Speaker, I stress that the proposal is not a threat to any party in the Assembly. It is an opportunity to positively and constructively address issues around emblems, flags and symbols and should be seen as such. Let me make it clear that there is no appetite in the SDLP for any point scoring on the issue. There is no appetite for that. However, we all have a job to do on behalf of the public. If passed, the motion would give us a chance to speak candidly in Committee — a much calmer environment — about our views on these matters. That is not what is happening with some Members, who really are stretching it to the limits.

I remind Members that the Commission carried out an internal good relations audit in line with its section 75 responsibilities in conjunction with Holywell Consultancy. Holywell Consultancy examined various documents, including the Assembly's corporate plan, the engagement strategy, the good relations action plan, the secretariat staff survey, the dignity at work policy and the Assembly equality scheme. I want to highlight some of the areas where we have fundamentally not been able to achieve consensus, but we are prepared, as reasonable politicians and in representing our parties on the Assembly Commission, to get to a consensus. The difference here is that two parties were trying to force through a situation. It is not and never has been the practice or policy of the Assembly Commission for any party or joint party motion to be tabled. That is what our concern was. The parties need to reflect on what they did prior to Christmas. It was done to the fiddle of those outside who were calling the tune.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr P Ramsey: I appeal to Members. I know that there is a petition of concern to guillotine the motion. However, this is an important subject, and the only way we can deal with it is through an ad hoc group.

Mrs Cochrane: I support the motion. I want to first address why the motion is before us. As was already mentioned, back in December, the unionist parties used a mechanism to bring a motion to the Assembly Commission. At that time, I made it clear that I was not prepared to discuss the matter during constant violence and intimidation. There are those who have said that by doing so I was boycotting the Commission meeting. However, I believe it was a principled stand that gave those proposing the motion the time to reflect on their role as Commission members, allowed some of the heat to go out of the situation and prevented us from making a knee-jerk reaction.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cochrane: No, I am not going to give way at the minute.

In the background, however, I met other Commission members to see if we could get consensus on the manner in which flags could be discussed in a formally constituted Commission meeting. I reminded my fellow Commission members that our role is to serve the Assembly and not individual parties and that, when making decisions, we should have due regard for equality. I also reminded them that, in June 2000, the Commission had agreed that the flag issue was a political matter best handled by the Assembly and that the Commission would operate to the existing regulations and take its direction from the Assembly.

There is an option for Members to bring a motion forward, and, although I do not agree with the DUP and UUP's motivation for doing that, they brought it forward, and they were operating in line with Commission procedures. Also, as the Commission's remit includes responsibility for good relations in this Building, regardless of whether some feel that flags and emblems are a matter best dealt with by the Assembly, the reality is that the corporate body has a role to play in this. I feel strongly that the matter will not be resolved satisfactorily without due regard for equality. Therefore, I was not willing to support the original motion. However, I showed leadership by trying to bring forward a revised motion that could be acceptable to all. Let us be clear: by agreeing to the new motion, the DUP and UUP have moved substantially from their original position in four ways. First, we are now asking for a report, not a consultation; secondly, there is no longer a predetermined outcome; thirdly, an equality impact assessment is now included; and, fourthly, the assumption that the Commission is the only place for the final decision to be taken has been removed. That is what consensus politics is about. The Speaker also sought to have all Commission members present in order to formally agree how wide-ranging such a report might be. Unfortunately, however, some members still felt unable to participate in the discussion.

Here we are today with a motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings

and to report to the Assembly. Parliament Buildings hosts a large number of events and visitors each year and has a significant opportunity to play a leading role in the encouragement of dialogue, shared learning and mutual respect for different faiths and cultural backgrounds. The Stormont building and its history represent challenges that require careful presentation, and I believe that those challenges can be met through attention to detail and sensitive negotiation. The Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the majority of people, and, regardless of whether some think it is redundant, the fact remains that those who signed up to the agreement and those who have taken office in the new institutions have a duty to ensure that such issues are dealt with sensitively and with an outcome that is balanced for everyone.

The existence of an Ad Hoc Committee and the work proposed for the Commission are not mutually exclusive. One might even inform the other. Therefore, I am content to support the motion. There is a need for mature debate.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cochrane: No, I will not give way, thank you. There is a need for mature debate around these contentious issues — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist.

Mrs Cochrane: We need to balance the role of the Commission, members of which are to act with integrity, including political impartiality, with the party political views of Members, which could be expressed via the Ad Hoc Committee. We should see the motion not as a threat but as an opportunity to look at issues that will allow the Northern Ireland Assembly to be reflected as an Assembly for everyone. We have an opportunity to show leadership in addressing difficult and challenging good relations issues, and we should take it today.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.38 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 1 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. Question 6 has been transferred to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) for written answer. Mr Roy Beggs is not in his place to ask question 2.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

3. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the purpose of the net fiscal balance report by his Department and how it is used. *(AQO 3487/11-15)*

5. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the purpose of the estimate on VAT produced by his officials for publication in the net fiscal balance report. *(AQO 3489/11-15)*

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to take questions 3 and 5 together.

The purpose of the latest net fiscal balance report is to provide a broad overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. As Members will be aware, the report provides an estimate of our overall net fiscal balance position, or fiscal deficit, which is, essentially, the difference between government expenditure and revenue raised locally. In that regard, the VAT estimate is merely one element. I remind Members again that, as the report indicates, it is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items such as VAT, which has been estimated in the absence of actual regional data.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will know that income tax, VAT and corporation tax make up an estimated half of the North's revenue. That is based on two surveys. There are question marks over where the headquarters of particular companies here are based, which affects the figures for corporation tax. Those figures have, potentially, been underestimated. Does he agree that the estimates are insufficient for the Executive and that there is a need for him and the Executive to put pressure on the Treasury to release more accurate figures, which, of course, it has?

Mr Wilson: We do not, in all cases, have the exact figures for revenue that is collected here in Northern Ireland. That is not only true for Northern Ireland, but for other devolved Administrations. One thing that I would say, however, is that the methods that are used are accepted under the codes for collecting official statistics and are recognised by the Office for National Statistics. Secondly, of course, the Scottish Government have accepted that the methods that are used for Scotland, which we mimic here in Northern Ireland, are acceptable ways of calculating estimates.

Let us bear in mind that, in gathering many official figures, initially, estimates have to be made. Take, for example, the

balance of payments figures for the United Kingdom, which tend to be estimates. Indeed, sometimes revisions are made as a result of more information becoming available later on.

The Member mentioned corporation tax. He mentioned one of the things that was not initially included. One of the reasons why we extended discussions with the Treasury was exactly to drill down and to try to get information on those figures. I am happy that, where there is dispute, there is a mechanism in place for dealing with that and for getting more accurate figures in the longer run.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Mitchel McLaughlin is not in his place to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for explaining the net fiscal balance. Does the Minister have a strategy for reducing the fiscal deficit? What would be in that strategy?

Mr Wilson: We do not want to be reliant on subsidies from central Government because, of course, when fiscal decisions are made at that level, it leaves the Northern Ireland economy a victim to changes. What is the Executive's policy on that? What do we seek to do? The reason why we have given primacy to growing the economy, especially the private sector, is to reduce our dependence on the transfer of funds from Westminster or parts of the United Kingdom to Northern Ireland. I point out to the Member that we are not in a unique position. Indeed, of all the regions of the United Kingdom, probably only two are in surplus; the others are in deficit. That is very often because of where most economic activity is generated. The more that we can generate and grow our economy here, the less dependent we will be on public sector spending, especially for benefits, etc, and the more revenue we will generate, whether through income tax or national insurance. Will we ever not have a deficit? I doubt it very much. I think that nine other regions of the United Kingdom are also in deficit because of their geographical position and because it is difficult to attract investment and generate economic activity. That is the benefit, of course, of being in the Union: we are part of a bigger constitutional unit in which the weaker areas can be helped by the stronger ones.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I suppose that many people listening to the questions and answers here today will be surprised to learn that we do not have accurate figures on revenue collected. Can the Minister suggest any steps that could be taken to ensure that, in future, we have more accurate figures?

Mr Wilson: First, I want to dispel the idea, which seems to be behind all the questions, that, somehow or other, the figures are simply made up. They are not. The methodology for collecting the figures has been accepted by those who are responsible for compiling official statistics in the United Kingdom. They abide by the code that is laid down for compiling statistics. These are not wild guesstimates; they are estimates based on criteria and methodologies accepted by those who are responsible for compiling statistics.

As far as greater accuracy is concerned, the more that one drills down into the figures, the more that one tries to ally the figures to a measure that closely reflects them. I will give the Member an example, which is how we estimate VAT. We look at the household survey to see what people in Northern Ireland spend their money on, and we take the VAT attributable to those kinds of goods and multiply it by the number of families, which gives us the estimate. To me, that is a fairly robust way of estimating the amount of VAT gathered in Northern Ireland: what are people's spending methods, what is the rate of VAT levied on those goods and how many families are there? Of course, given that the list of things that people spend their money on —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's two minutes are up.

Mr Wilson: — is generalised, that figure is, to some degree, bound to be an estimate.

Special Advisers

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the appeals mechanism in the code of conduct for special advisers. *(AQO 3488/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: I interpret the question to mean what appeals mechanism is set out in the arrangements introduced in September 2011 for appointing special advisers.

My Department applies the vetting/character checking process to prospective special advisers, as it does to all other civil servants. Under those arrangements, I undertook to review the appointment process. My Department makes a recommendation to the appointing Minister about a test of character. For special advisers only, an independent appeals process has been built into the decision-making process. If a Minister or a prospective candidate for a special adviser post disagrees with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) recommendation, an appeal can be made. That will be to an external body that will not have any contact with DFP, the Civil Service or Ministers. The panel will be totally independent, and it will take a number of factors into consideration when hearing a person's appeal.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed reply. From the tenor of the reply, I assume that this appeals mechanism has not yet been used. In the event of it being used, who would choose the independent members of the panel, how big would the panel be, and where would those members come from?

Mr Wilson: It has not been used to date. All special advisers have gone through the vetting process, but it has not been necessary to use the panel as yet.

The panel would be made up of outside individuals. They would be chosen by the Department, and, I imagine, would probably be individuals such as trade union officials, people who have been involved in adjudicating on labour relations issues or other such independent people. They will be totally independent of the Department, the Civil Service and any of the parties — there would be no political involvement in any of that. We would envisage an appeal panel of uneven numbers, probably three.

Mr Ross: How far apart are the arrangements that the Minister has put in place and those in the private Member's Bill that has been brought to the House by Mr Allister? Does he still believe that that private Member's Bill is necessary?

Mr Wilson: The view that I took —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I warn Members that this is Question Time to the Minister of Finance and Personnel and not on a future private Member's Bill.

Mr Wilson: I think that the question that was being asked was what was my view vis-à-vis the arrangements that I have in place and the arrangements that Mr Allister has brought to the House.

It was always my view that something that is agreed among the parties would be much better, rather than having to go down a route of a vote being taken in the Assembly on the issue. Whether it had a statutory basis or simply had the basis of guidance that I had issued, the important thing to me was that it had the agreement of all the parties. Sadly, at the time of the Bill's introduction and its Second Stage, that agreement was not in place. Therefore, I took the view at that stage — I still hold it — that, given the concerns, it was necessary to have something in place that we could apply to all special advisers.

The concern I had at that stage with Mr Allister's Bill was the fact that there was no appeals mechanism, and as I said in answer to Mr Maginness's question, I believe that an appeals mechanism is important. Basically, Mr Allister's arrangements were much more absolutist than mine, and I always believed that they could be improved by including an appeals mechanism. That would allow us to have those arrangements on a statutory footing, and they would apply to everyone who was appointed as a special adviser.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am prepared to take another couple of supplementary questions, but that is on the basis that they are about the question and not the Bill.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as uchta a fhreagra. Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank you, and I thank the Minister for his responses. Given that the CBI and the trade unions supported the guidelines produced by OFMDFM, will the Minister call for those to be implemented? That will ensure that employers have the flexibility to select the right person for the job.

Mr Wilson: Whether we use the guidelines that I introduced or put the issue on a statutory footing, a number of important things should be considered. First, the arrangements should apply to all special advisers. Secondly, they should assure people that they can stand the test of time and cannot easily be changed in the future. Thirdly, they should give everyone a fair opportunity, even if they have involved themselves in something in the past that people would have regarded as wrong and tarnished their public image. They should be given the chance to show that they had changed, etc. Those were the important things to me. That was what was on offer; it was not accepted, and the Assembly will decide at some time in the future what is the best way of doing that. I am saying only what all the ingredients are. There should be a mechanism for vetting people who are appointed to such posts. If they disagree with that vetting, there should be a mechanism for them to have their say. There should then be an independent assessment of the case that they have made to decide whether they are suitable for the job.

2.15 pm

Mr Allister: Does the Minister agree that one of the fallouts from the Mary McArdle appointment was a realisation that procedures that had no regard for the thoughts or interests of victims were lacking in a material consideration? Therefore, as well as looking at pertinent matters such as contrition, any review mechanism should, if it can, devise a means whereby the views of those most directly affected, namely, the victims of the individual, can be taken on board.

Mr Wilson: My view was that any mechanism of appeal, review or whatever it happens to be should be transparent and clear enough to ensure that people appointed to these positions had the confidence of the general public. If they had been engaged in something in their past, they would be able to show, because of changes in their attitude, lifestyle and the fact that they had shown remorse for their deeds, that they could gain that confidence. If one of the ways of building that confidence is to feed in the kind of information that the Member suggested, of course the Assembly needs to look at doing that in any appeal mechanism.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been answered. Question 6 has been withdrawn and transferred.

Procurement: NIAO Report

7. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report 'Department of Finance and Personnel — Collaborative Procurement and Aggregated Demand'. *(AQO 3491/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: I welcome the Audit Office report into collaborative procurement and aggregated demand. It has raised a number of important issues. The recommendations are being considered by the procurement board. The report will be the subject of a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing on 29 May, and while the matters are under consideration by the PAC, I do not want to comment a great deal on the particular issues. However, there are general points, of course, in the report that I am quite happy to answer questions on today.

Mr Rogers: How does the Minister propose to manage the risks of our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) being detrimentally affected by increased aggregation of demand and collaboration?

Mr Wilson: The report highlights the fact that there could be a conflict between having collaborative procurement — where we bundle all the public sector contracts into one big contract to gain economies of scale and reduce the cost — and maintaining our current record of ensuring that SMEs get a fair share of public sector contracts in Northern Ireland. It is a conflict; the report recognises that, and so must Members. If we want to make savings in large-scale contracts, we must recognise that that may well preclude firms. Just this week, I have dealt with letters and with queries from Ministers who have asked me questions about maintenance contracts that have been bundled together. Therefore, the bigger the contract, the more that you ask people for working capital guarantees and turnover guarantees because of the size of the contract. Once you do that, you exclude a lot of small firms. That is something that the Audit Office and the Assembly have to be aware of. There is that conflict. One of the things that you can do, of course, is get a lot of small companies to tender collaboratively or, where

there is a big contract, get some of it split up so that small subcontractors can come in.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Is a collaborative approach taken to energy contracts?

Mr Wilson: As far as energy contracts are concerned, DFP's property division, which has responsibility for the Northern Ireland Government estate, has collaborative contracts for fuel and for electricity. However, that does not include all public sector bodies. For example, Translink is not included, and neither is Northern Ireland Water.

Collaborative contracts work better when you are dealing with large-scale firms. There is no danger of excluding smaller firms from purchasing electricity, because only a couple of companies here in Northern Ireland generate and sell it. There are collaborative contracts that mean that you do not have the problem that Mr Rogers highlighted in his question. Of course, we ought to look more intensively at those.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. In light of the failure to deliver on the projected savings throughout the collaborative procurement, would the Minister agree that a centralised procurement group, perhaps based in his Department, could help to achieve maximum savings?

Mr Wilson: Various centres of procurement expertise (COPEs) in a number of Departments are responsible for procurement in those Departments. There are sometimes very good reasons for that, because expertise is particular to one Department or whatever. Although I would like to expand my empire, I am not so sure that centralising all procurement under one body would always be the best solution. Secondly, and as I said, where there is that kind of joint approach, there is a danger that some of the smaller firms would lose out.

In the procurement board, we will be looking at where different COPEs can perhaps come together to hear about the kind of things that we are going to purchase this year and whether some of those things can be banded together. Even if COPEs insist on having their own contracts, another way of doing it may be to at least standardise the kind of things that we purchase. For example, if you are purchasing desks, do you need 10 varieties? Can you not have one variety so that, even though each individual COPE is purchasing, you know that there is one standard kind of desk and that you can, therefore, get the cost down?

North/South Co-operation: Expenditure

8. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the annual net expenditure to the Executive from North/South co-operation. *(AQO 3492/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: The Executive incur expenditure through their contribution to the running of the North/South bodies that were established under the Good Friday Agreement. In 2011-12 that amounted to a total expenditure of £38·9 million. In addition, Northern Ireland Departments engage in practical co-operation with the Republic of Ireland on the delivery of public services. As I said in another debate in the House, that includes healthcare and education, etc. The net cost of that practical co-operation is £11·2 million. That is mainly a result of more students using schools in Northern Ireland, whether those are primary schools or further education colleges, than we have people going across the border to be taught in the Republic.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he advise us whether the North/South bodies are subject to delivering savings during the Budget period?

Mr Wilson: They are required to deliver savings. The savings of 3% a year that they are required to deliver are the same as those that Northern Ireland Departments are required to deliver. That is up until 2013. The savings beyond 2013 have not been established yet, but, for the past two years, they have been required to make savings of 3%, and they have met those targets. There will be a requirement of 3% this year, and, of course, it is then up to Ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic to look at what savings are made beyond that.

I can assure the Member that, in all the conversations that I have had with them, Ministers from the Republic are as keen as I am to see savings made in the cross-border bodies.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Is he willing to acknowledge the reality that co-operation between Departments on a single-island basis, rather than incurring unnecessary or unreasonable expenditure, contributes to financial savings, not least in health?

Mr Wilson: The logic of that is for the Republic to stop being so stand-offish and join the United Kingdom, and we would then have the benefits of the whole of the United Kingdom in which to share those services. However, that is probably as much of a fairy tale as Sinn Féin's hope of getting a united Ireland by 2016. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Minister, you are well off the mark. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Wilson: I was referring to the question.

Let me address the issue. I have had meetings with Ministers from the Republic, and I have no difficulty with sharing facilities across the border if that helps to reduce costs for us and them. Only a fool would say that we should not do that. My one concern is where we provide services but do not get payment for them, which means that they are being provided at a net cost to taxpayers in Northern Ireland.

However, there are many good examples. The Health Minister, who is sitting beside me, has, for example, made it quite clear that one of the ways in which to keep local provision at Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry is for greater use of it to be made by people from across the border. We have a cancer unit at Altnagelvin Hospital that came about only because part of the capital cost and the ongoing revenue cost is shared by the Republic, whereby people from Donegal can come across to Londonderry. We have gained from that. We could not have had a stand-alone facility at Altnagelvin Hospital were it to rely on Northern Ireland custom alone. By having input from the Republic and hammering down that it would make a contribution, the people of the north-west have the benefit of a cancer unit at Altnagelvin.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Are he and his Department consulted by other Departments on any new proposed initiatives on cross-border co-operation?

Mr Wilson: If such initiatives are purely within the remit of individual Ministers and do not require, for example, additional capital for which bids are required to be made, individual Departments are very often left to engage in those arrangements. However, in many such instances — I have spoken with the Finance Minister in the Republic on a number of occasions about this — the initial impetus will come from the two Finance Ministers, who will ask whether co-operation is possible between Departments, after which individual Ministers and Departments will get on with the job.

Executive: Savings Delivery Plans

9. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what advice his Department gives to other Departments regarding savings delivery plans. *(AQO 3493/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: Responsibility for the development of departmental savings delivery plans rests with individual Ministers. However, at the outset of the process, and to assist them in developing their plans, DFP issued guidance to Departments outlining the key issues that they needed to consider. A key element of that guidance was to highlight to Departments that, in the first instance, savings should be made from reductions in administration and improvements in efficiency. Where that cannot be achieved, Departments should seek to identify savings measures that minimise the impact on front line public services.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Has he set any parameters for the cuts in administration costs — say, 10% — that he hopes to get? What co-operation is he getting from all Departments? Are any in default of co-operation?

Mr Wilson: The Departments are required to make savings of 3% a year. In all years of the Budget so far, all Departments have met that requirement, and some have exceeded it.

One or two Departments have fallen short by maybe 1% or 2% in a particular year and picked it up in the next year. However, by and large, all Departments have met or exceeded the targets. The complaint has been that the savings that have been made by cutting front line services are not regarded as real efficiency savings. That is one of the comments that was made in the Northern Ireland Audit Office report.

2.30 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 2 and 12 have been withdrawn and require written answers. As Mr John McCallister is not in his place, I call Mr Chris Hazzard.

Public Health: Beef Products

3. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is any public health risk involved in eating beef products that have been contaminated with horse meat. *(AQO 3502/11-15)*

Mr Poots: On the basis of evidence, there is no food safety risk to consumers from implicated meat products. However, this is an unacceptable situation. People have a right to expect that the food that they are eating is correctly described. It is the responsibility of food businesses to ensure that the food that they sell contains what it says on the label. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is following all lines of inquiry in this investigation and working with all the relevant authorities, including other government Departments, district councils, police forces and authorities in other European countries. Swift action has been taken where there is evidence of fraudulent activity.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister outline who funds the FSA here and who it is accountable to?

Mr Poots: The Food Standards Agency is funded directly by us, but it is not responsible to the Assembly as such. It is a body that is outside the Assembly. That arrangement was set up because of the issues that surrounded the BSE problems and the lack of faith in politicians at that point in time.

I note that the Member's party has suggested that the Food Standards Agency should maybe come under political authority. That is the same party that called for an independent environment protection agency just a few years ago. It appears that that party has done somersaults on this issue.

Ms Brown: Will the Minister clarify the position on the slaughter of horses in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: It is legal to slaughter horses and to sell horse meat in the United Kingdom provided that it comes from an approved abattoir and carries an official stamp declaring that it is fit for human consumption.

Until a relatively short time ago, horses were killed in Northern Ireland at a rate of around 40 every fortnight. Those horses were exported, and that trade was legal, legitimate and carried out properly. The company has since discontinued that course of work because it was interfering with other aspects of its business. However, there was no indication whatsoever or evidence of any kind that that particular horse meat was ending up in the food market in Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom.

Mr McClarty: Given the unexpected nature of the horse meat scandal, is the Minister confident in the assurances that he has been given and those that he, in turn, has given himself?

Mr Poots: Confidence should lie in why this meat would not be fit for human consumption. It would not be fit for human consumption if contained bute, which is a drug that is given to horses. Of the tests carried out on horse carcasses by 30 January, 100% indicated that bute was not present in any of those carcasses. A huge amount of testing has been carried out. We are satisfied that this is not a danger to the public from a food safety perspective.

This is a labelling issue. It is an issue of fraudulent behaviour. I trust that people will be in court and charged in due course. Some of those involved are very big companies. Let us be honest: they need to be gone after and pursued rigorously. However, this is not a food safety issue. That has been our line throughout, because it is accurate.

Accident and Emergency Departments: Waiting Times

4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how many breaches of the 12-hour waiting time have occurred in accident and emergency departments since November 2012. *(AQO 3503/11-15)*

15. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken to reduce accident and emergency waiting times at Antrim Area Hospital. *(AQO 3514/11-15)*

Mr Poots: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 4 and 15 together, as they relate to emergency department performance.

From 1 November 2012 to 31 January 2013, 1,656 patients waited longer than 12 hours for admission or discharge to emergency departments. That represents an average of 1% of all attendances across the health and social care trusts. In Antrim Area Hospital, 632 patients or 3·7% of patients waited longer than 12 hours during that period. While those figures are an improvement on the same period in 2011-12, it is unacceptable to me that anyone has to wait that length of time. I continue to look to the Health and Social Care Board and trusts to ensure that action is taken to further improve waiting times and the patient experience in our emergency departments.

While there has been some improvement in the A&E waiting times at Antrim Area Hospital, that improvement has not, in my view, been sufficient. It is for that reason, and in recognition of the challenges that the trust is facing, that I took the decision, in December, to appoint a small turnaround and support team to complete a strategic overview in order to establish what changes and support might be required to accelerate progress. The turnaround and support team is working alongside the support already being provided by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency through the emergency department improvement action group. I expect these initiatives to impact positively on waiting times at Antrim Area Hospital's emergency department.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. Considering the fact that A&Es are backed up due to other issues in hospitals, what changes have been made to ensure that other consultants work in the evenings? How many hospitals carry out discharges in the evenings?

Mr Poots: We are operating on the basis of an improved performance across the system. For example, we have had no reported 12-hour breaches for the Royal Victoria Hospital. However, I do not find it acceptable that there are six-, seven- or eight-hour breaches; those are not acceptable waiting times either. Certainly, my drive for the services within our emergency departments is that we take all the waiting times down to less than four hours, although the target is not yet set at that.

We are seeing a different kind of performance from our hospitals. We are looking at a whole-hospital system. The HSCB and the improvement action group continue to work with trusts to improve processes to provide greater flexibility in our hospitals, including pharmacy, and to ensure that we get swifter discharges and better admission rates, including direct admissions from GPs. In all that, there are great opportunities for continued improvement. I welcome the improvement that has happened thus far, but it does not go far enough.

Mr Beggs: In the Minister's initial answer, he referred to the considerable 12-hour breaches in our A&E units. Can he advise us about why there are significant failures to hit the four-hour waiting time targets at our hospitals when most hospitals in the rest of the United Kingdom meet the National Health Service standards?

Mr Poots: Yes; between November 2012 and January 2013, 76·5% of patients received emergency care or were discharged within the four-hour period. I do not accept that as being good enough. We need to ensure that we make further improvements on that, and we need to move up to those targets. I do not see any reason why we cannot reach where everyone else is in the UK. I will continue to keep that pressure on the trusts. We are not at a situation that is acceptable to the public; therefore, we need to expect better performance and improvement.

I think that I have made that very clear, particularly in the Northern Trust area. Performance was falling well short of the mark there, and that is why we have the turnaround team. It is also one of the reasons why the chairman is not there anymore. We did not have an acceptance that such improvement could be made, and I do not accept that improvement cannot be made. I will continue to pressurise, to harass and to cajole until we get the figures up where they should be. Certainly, it is not acceptable to me otherwise, and I do not think that it is acceptable to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I call Sue Ramsey, I remind Members that I would not normally allow her to ask a supplementary since she will be asking a question immediately after this, but I am treating this as an exceptional case.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I appreciate that. Minister, you are aware of the stuff in the media about the Ulster Hospital. Will you outline why patients were there with the ambulance crews for four hours? Will you outline whether there was a divert to the Ulster Hospital, and, in turn, did the Ambulance Service divert away from the Ulster Hospital?

Mr Poots: There are diverts, on an ongoing basis, from the Ulster Hospital to the Royal, and I will deal with that a little more in a moment. Yesterday, there were 66 ambulances at the Ulster Hospital, and last Monday there were 68. Normally, the figure is somewhere in the 50s. When you have the ambulances pulling up, you normally get 60% of the people in those ambulances admitted to the hospital. The increase in ambulances meant that there were an additional six admissions.

The situation has proved very tight when it comes to the number of admissions that are taking place in the South Eastern Trust area. There have been more medical admissions, and there is quite an elderly population in that area. Consequently, the hospital is under greater pressure. The Royal does take diverts from the Ulster Hospital. We need to give some consideration to that because although the Ulster is the main hospital in the Trust area, which also contains Downe and Lagan Valley, it does not have the capacity that the Belfast Trust has in terms of acute beds.

We would do well to give some consideration to the number of beds that are likely to become available in the Ulster Hospital on a particular day. If it is recognised that there are pressures, the diverts should be put in place earlier to ensure that the pressures are absorbed in a better way. We do not want to see people waiting in ambulances outside a hospital. That is not the type of care that this Assembly wants. We are talking to the trusts and the HSCB about that. Hugh McCaughey has spent some time with us today to talk about those issues.

Mr I McCrea: Like the Minister, I was totally appalled to hear the figures for Antrim Area Hospital, with 632 patients having to wait over 12 hours. Does the Minister believe that the turnaround team that he has in place in the Northern Trust area, whilst it may have the desire to make changes, has the wherewithal to tackle that issue? If it does not, what steps can the Minister take?

Mr Poots: The turnaround team has dealt with other areas and seen significant improvement as a consequence. We need the Northern Trust's co-operation and willingness to work with the turnaround team. Thus far, that has been the case. We also need an ability to take difficult decisions, because we cannot go through life making easy decisions all of the time. Sometimes, you have to make those hard decisions. If people are not up to that and do not want to make those hard decisions, there is not a place for them. I do not have any evidence that that is the case, but we will continue to work with the Northern Trust on the issue.

Let me be absolutely clear: the service that the public are receiving from emergency departments, particularly at Antrim hospital, is not acceptable. I do not want that to continue. We are making an investment in the capital infrastructure there, but we need to support it through personnel, and we have been doing that.

We need to get very clear evidence on how this can be moved forward, and then we need to move it forward. The very clear position of myself, the Department and the HSCB is that we can turn this around, and we will endeavour to do so over the next number of months.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answers. The Minister has put great emphasis on the turnaround team finding a solution to the problems, particularly at Antrim hospital. Is that team independent of the trust and the Department, or is it in some way connected to the trust? In what way is it actually working?

2.45 pm

Mr Poots: It is wholly independent of the trust and the Department. The turnaround team from Cumbria is doing the work at no cost to us. I greatly appreciate the work and support that the team is giving us, and they are people who have expertise in turning difficult situations around. It will work only if we get co-operation. People in the trust may want to carry on doing the same thing that they have always done and getting the same results — I am sorry, but that will not be good enough. If people are obstructive, they will need to look at themselves because they do not fulfil the role that we require in the health service. We need a health service that can respond to difficulties and respond very swiftly and effectively to the needs of the public. I expect that the turnaround team will receive full co-operation to achieve that.

Protect Life Strategy

5. **Ms S Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Protect Life strategy in light of the 100% increase in suicide over the last 10 years. *(AQO 3504/11-15)*

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland suicide rate doubled before the Protect Life strategy was published in late 2006. However, the rate has remained high, with an average of 277 recorded deaths each year since 2007. The Northern Ireland Audit Office has acknowledged that the relative impact of the Protect Life strategy on suicide is difficult to estimate because suicide is primarily a societal issue and is, therefore, influenced by a very wide range of interacting factors. International evidence indicates that efforts to reduce national suicide trends need to be sustained and long-term.

There is no such thing as a quick fix to this highly complex problem. Undoubtedly, lives have been saved through Protect Life services, but it is not possible to estimate how many. Independent evaluation has identified a number of positive outcomes as a result of Protect Life, including strong community engagement in prevention, a reduction in stigma and raised awareness. Areas highlighted for improvement include better prioritisation of actions and enhanced cross-departmental working to address the underlying wider issues that contribute to increased risk.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. It is an issue that the rate has increased 100% over the past 10 years. Despite all of what you have just said, Minister, and despite the work that is done daily, you told us last week or the week before that the ministerial subgroup had met recently but was not due to meet again until August. I appeal to you to recognise that that time frame is too long. Do you believe that suicide is a priority in your Department and in the Executive? I am concerned that we seem to take a run at suicide and suicide issues and it then falls away again. If the ministerial subgroup does not meet until August, that does not send a clear message.

Mr Poots: The only Ministers who turned up to the last meeting were Minister Ford and me. Ministers need to take suicide seriously, because it is a very serious issue. That said, there is a series of actions to be carried out from the meetings, one of which is to promote positive mental health through sport, working with the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure and, to reach rural communities, working with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

So cross-departmental work is flowing from those meetings, and it is more important to develop actions in those meetings that are then followed up and carried through. It is very clearly our intention to carry those actions through to make that difference because there is no single answer to this. However, if we keep taking incremental steps and have a series of people doing a series of different things, that will help to get the message out that suicide is not the best but the worst option and that people should think over and over again and seek help if they have suicidal thoughts.

Mr Weir: What changes are being made as a result of refreshing the Protect Life strategy?

Mr Poots: The strategy, which was published in June last year, contained a number of new actions, including

involving sporting organisations in delivering positive mental health and well-being messages; identifying specific arts interventions; and providing community-based health checks in rural areas.

The Public Health Agency is taking forward a number of additional enhanced services, including self-harm and family support services; self-harm training in support of National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines for the management of self-harm; additional and enhanced services for vulnerable and marginalised groups; and the development of a new public information campaign. As well as that, we are doing more work with sporting organisations and direct work with rural communities, so a considerable amount of work is flowing from that programme.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for the meetings that he has held with groups in my constituency of East Belfast on suicide, and I give credit where credit is due for his attention to the matter in my constituency. In what way will he, his Department or the Public Health Agency be responding to the very specific increase in death by suicide in East Belfast? In particular, what is his assessment of how the "card before you leave" scheme, sudden death reporting and community response systems are working?

Mr Poots: East Belfast has come to light recently because of the high number of suicides in that constituency. That has not been a recent trend but has been ongoing for some time. It is an area where we need to ensure that people have the opportunities to deal with their problems.

Not everyone who has suicide ideation has presented with mental health issues, so there is a course of work that can be done on the mental health side to have people admitted to psychiatric units more quickly when GPs recommend it, to have them discharged more quickly and to have GPs take on more of the work after discharge. If people have to wait for eight weeks from being referred by a GP before they are admitted to a psychiatric unit, a huge amount of damage is done, and they then have to spend considerably longer in a unit. We will get a much quicker turnaround of people through the units and deal with them more effectively in that way.

The majority of people who take their own life have not previously presented with mental health issues, so it is very important to get messages out through sporting clubs and various organisations where you can speak to people, relate to them and get the message to them that there is hope and opportunity and a chance for a better life and for them to think again if they have suicide ideation.

Mr Gardiner: The increase in suicide rates is of great concern. Does the Minister accept that the legacy of decades of violence has contributed to the traumatisation of communities and individuals and has left a legacy of unaddressed mental health needs?

Mr Poots: I have absolutely no doubt that the legacy of violence is a contributory factor. We still have groups that are organised in our communities. There is still a level of fear in many communities. People who have committed crimes in the past have difficulty living with those crimes. Others have been victims of violence and have found it difficult to cope. I have absolutely no doubt that the legacy of the Troubles is still presenting itself in the form of suicide, and the Member has put his finger on that issue.

Cancer Care

6. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the extent of collaboration taking place in cancer care. *(AQO 3505/11-15)*

Mr Poots: In recent years, we have seen the principle of collaboration and co-operation mainstreamed into cancer care. At a local level, multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) collaborate to deliver the best care pathway for individual patients. MDTs are groups of health professionals including nurses, doctors, physiotherapists and occupational therapists who work together to discuss a patient's treatment and care.

At the regional level, patients have benefited from the reconfiguration of cancer services on a hub-and-spoke model, with the Belfast cancer centre working collaboratively with the cancer units at Altnagelvin, Antrim, Craigavon and the Ulster Hospital. We are also working collaboratively at a national and international level, most notably in the development of radiotherapy services at Altnagelvin, which will treat patients from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland also contributes to national and international programmes that provide us with valuable benchmarking information to ensure that real progress is being made in cancer services.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I place on record the appreciation of many people in Northern Ireland who have benefited greatly as a result of the care that has been provided for them when they go through what can only be described as a very traumatic time. Will the Minister elaborate on the benefits to Northern Ireland of working with countries such as the United States of America on cancer?

Mr Poots: The funding agencies in Ireland and Northern Ireland have worked with the Department for Employment and Learning and Invest NI and have developed common documentation and working procedures to deal with funding proposals involving health research from both jurisdictions and the US. That is being implemented and was launched in August 2012. That allows for two health projects funded through the partnership, and will support the salaries of 15 clinical and academic researchers who are delivering outcomes in line with the aims of the partnership, spanning healthcare advancements and economic development. A recent highlight was the publication of major findings and identification of genes that may cause some patients with diabetes to develop serious kidney disease, while other diabetic patients do not.

We are working very hard through the National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium. The five work stream areas that have been identified for that are capital building for clinical research; public health and well-being; prevention and health promotion, to include population health research; nursing, palliative and end-of-life care; and survivorship. All of that is helping Northern Ireland become more skilled and more advanced and to deliver better results when it comes to treating people with cancer.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra, agus seo í mo cheist féin ar an ábhar áirithe seo. Has the Minister any plans to develop cross-border links with the Beacon Hospital in Dublin, which has recently installed pioneering new stereotactic body radiation

therapy (SBRT) equipment called CyberKnife, which has been shown to have extremely positive outcomes on some cancers?

Mr Poots: We have just recently installed a new facility in the Belfast City Hospital that allows us to carry out that stereotactic work, and we are training staff to enable them to take that further. So, very good work is going on in Belfast City Hospital's cancer unit to enable people who are currently travelling outside of Northern Ireland to receive that care.

We want to maximise the amount of care that we can carry out here in Northern Ireland. However, when there are people who have conditions that need treated by further expertise, we are happy to work with others, whether in GB or in the Republic of Ireland, to ensure they receive appropriate care.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his information around collaboration on cancer. Will he confirm the timeline of 2015 or 2016 for the work on the north-west cancer unit?

Mr Poots: The north-west cancer unit should be finished by 2015, with commissioning to take place to have it operational by 2016. That work continues to progress and there is no indication that there is any delay on it.

Ulster Hospital: Operations

7. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many operations have been postponed in the Ulster Hospital over the last 12 months. *(AQO 3506/11-15)*

Mr Poots: During the period January to December 2012, there were 305 patients on the waiting list for an operation who had the notified date for their operation deferred.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the issues raised by the Chair of the Committee, will the Minister tell us whether further operations have had to be cancelled because of those events?

Mr Poots: Almost on a daily basis, obviously, a procedure is cancelled, but that is for very good reasons. If someone is waiting for an orthopaedic procedure, but there has been a major traumatic car crash the previous night, obviously the surgeons are called away to carry out that work. If someone is waiting for a heart operation but someone else has had a heart attack the previous night, very often the surgeons are called in to carry out the operations on the cardiac table.

So it is just a fact of life that many times operations that are elective have to be cancelled because of emergency procedures. That is one of the reasons why we have gone down a route with Belfast City Hospital of making it, almost exclusively, an elective centre so that operations are not cancelled, and that mix between emergency and elective does not happen.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. Members will take their ease while we change the top Table.

3.00 pm

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Assembly Business

Mr Beggs: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I apologise to you and to the Assembly for not being in my place during questions to the Finance Minister. I will endeavour to be in my place — *[Interruption.]* — in the future and not to be caught out by others who withdraw questions.

Mr Speaker: Order. I thank the Member for coming to the House and apologising for not being in his place during Question Time. Other Members were not in their place, and I hope that they will follow the Member's example in coming to the House and apologising.

Two weeks ago or more, some Members were not in their place and have still to apologise or give a reason why they were not in their place. We are keeping a watching brief on the issue, and we will deal with those Members who feel that they should not come to the House and apologise or give a reason. However, I thank the Member for coming to the House and apologising to the whole House.

Private Members' Business

Ad Hoc Committee: Parliament Buildings

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly approves the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly. — [Ms Ruane.]*

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the issue, although I am not sure why it has been brought to the House. Reinventing the wheel is not normally recognised as good practice, particularly if things are working well. We have an Assembly Commission, which I do not think that there have been any complaints about in the past. It appears to me to be working well. It has a good history, and, going right back to 1998, it has dealt with very sensitive issues over the lifetime of the Assembly. So, the proposal —

Ms Ruane: Will the Member take an intervention?

Mr Poots: Yes, I will.

Ms Ruane: I absolutely agree that, in the past, the Assembly Commission worked on consensus. The problem here is that your party brought a proposal to the Assembly Commission that went against what your party and, indeed, other parties agreed in 2002. That was that the place for flags and discussion around flags is in the Chamber and not in the Assembly Commission. So, the reason why it worked well was because you did not bring the issue to the Assembly Commission. However, you have now reneged on that, and that is what is causing the difficulty.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Poots: That was an interesting speech from the Member, and I will deal with those issues as I go through what I have to say.

The Assembly Commission has an exemplary history, and we commend it for the work that it has done. However, I see today's motion as somewhat of a vote of no confidence in the Assembly Commission by the Member and thus in her membership of the Commission. The fact that Sinn Féin does not bother to turn up for Assembly Commission meetings does not ring very well with democracy and does not demonstrate that it has a real commitment to the democratic institution that is here and in the Assembly Commission. Of course, I think that Ms Ruane deems democracy to be whatever Sinn Féin says that it happens to be at a particular time. So, in some instances, you have to have a weighted majority, and in others, you have to have a majority of both communities. However, Sinn Féin is quite happy for Belfast City Council to have a majority vote, although, if a similar vote were to take place in the Assembly, it would have to be by consensus. Belfast City Council does not have to recognise consensus for Sinn Féin, but this House does. Where is the difference? There is no difference, but there is in Ms Ruane's world. She needs to explain to the House why she demands consensus here but accepts majority rule just a few miles down the road.

I know that Ms Ruane has some difficulty accepting realities. The reality that we have here is that this is an Administration that has powers devolved to it from Westminster. As far as I know, she does not live in the United Kingdom, but she is employed in the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: She takes British sterling, and, obviously, with the powers devolved from Westminster, as a former Minister in the Assembly, she brought forward legislation that had to be signed off by Her Majesty the Queen.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Poots: As a Minister in this House, Ms Ruane was quite happy to bring forward legislation that had to receive Royal Assent before one single shred of it could be enacted. She needs to accept the reality that this is part of the United Kingdom, whether she likes it or not. It is internationally recognised, and there are tripartite agreements recognising that. That will change only when the people of Northern Ireland consent to doing something different, and local indications recently suggest that that consent is not forthcoming. In fact, it is very much the opposite.

We have a system that works very well in the House, and I think that we should stick to a system that works well in the House. We should not be cajoled into doing something different because Sinn Féin likes consensus in one place but majority rule in another, and it does not know whether it is coming or going when it comes to democratic issues, but there is no particular surprise there. I am wholly opposed to the motion and commend the Assembly Commission on the work that it has been doing.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I suppose that it is to be welcomed that we are here today discussing how we deal with flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings. Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht seo inniu. We need to address the issues in an open and transparent way if we are to be faithful to the sentiments of the Assembly Commission action plan.

The Good Friday Agreement tells us that we are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect. De réir Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta, táimid tiomanta do chomhpháirtíocht, chomhionannas, agus do mheas ar a chéile. If equality is about everyone being treated the same, with all our traditions and cultures being respected, this Building, which houses the power-sharing Assembly, does little to address that. There is no evidence of equality here. Níl aon fhianaise go bhfuil comhionannas anseo. We have heard already about flags and emblems, but I would like to put a particular focus on the issue of the Irish language. Ba mhaith liom díriú ar leith ar an Ghaeilge. The Assembly Commission literature states:

> *"Parliament Buildings hosts a large number of events and visitors each year and has a significant opportunity to play a leading role in the encouragement of dialogue, shared learning and mutual respect for different faiths and cultural backgrounds."*

Despite those positive words, there is merely a nod and a wink to them when it comes to respect for the culture of Irish speakers here.

A welcome sheet showing a plan of the Building is available at reception. It points out different parts of the Building, and it is available in a variety of languages. If you look carefully through the sheets, you will eventually come upon one in Irish. If you ask in advance, you can come up here and take the Parliament Buildings tour in Irish, but only if you give notice. Caithfidh tú iarratas a chur isteach roimh ré más maith leat an turas ar Fhoirgnimh na Parlaiminte a dhéanamh as Gaeilge. Those are minimal gestures only, and they are not enough. We need to have an environment in which all — staff, Members and visitors — feel that their culture is treated with respect.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Ms McCorley: No, I will not. *[Interruption.]* That means that we should see bilingual signage around this entire Building.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms McCorley: Ciallaíonn sin gur chóir dúinn comharthaí dhá-theangacha a fheiceáil san Fhoirgneamh iomlán sin. Where we have a sign in English, it should also include Irish and Ulster Scots, if that is what people want. In the Chamber — *[Interruption.]*

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it appropriate that people are speaking while our colleague is trying to speak?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. Members should not shout across the Floor. Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat. In the Chamber, we should have a simultaneous translation system for all Members requiring it. Sometimes in this Assembly there are questions raised and negative comments made about the Irish language, but the fact is that there is a vibrant Irish language community out there that wishes to live life through the medium of Irish. They are entitled to services in this society and to have those delivered through the language of their choice.

The Irish-language community increases daily. Tá pobal na Gaeilge ag fás go laethúil. Well over 3,000 schoolchildren are currently being educated through the medium of Irish in over 80 schools throughout the North of Ireland. Why would anyone in the Assembly wish to make those children feel excluded or disrespected when they, like children from many other schools, pay a visit here? Why would anyone deny them their cultural respect? What does that say about this Assembly?

Mr Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I thought that the motion was about an Ad Hoc Committee on flags and emblems, and not a history lesson on Irish. Maybe we could get back to the motion.

Mr McCartney: On a further point of order.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me finish with this point of order. A number of Members have gone well outside the motion. *[Interruption.]* Order. Yes, of course, if Members, whatever they are saying, can link it to the motion — but most who have spoken have gone well outside the motion.

Mr McCartney: Further to that point of order, they say that ignorance is bliss. If you read the motion, it says, "flags, emblems, symbols and language". So, read the motion before you make a point of order. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Ruane: On a further point of order. At one point, I counted six men across the way speaking while my colleague was trying to make points. Then we had the comment on language. I would just ask the Speaker to make a ruling on the fact that she has been interrupted on every single occasion — by men, I have to say. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us show some courtesy, order and respect in the House. Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. And, yes, this is about language, so tá mise ag díriú ar an Ghaeilge.

I believe it would be a refreshing and positive signal to be coming from this Assembly at the start of Seachtain na Gaeilge if we could proclaim that we welcome cultural richness, celebrate diversity and respect all languages. Más féidir linn a rá os ard go gcuirimid fáilte roimh shaibhreas cultúrtha, éagsúlacht agus teanga.

We do not expect everyone to sign up to Líofa if they do not wish to do that. What we do expect is that we put an end to the barriers and begrudgery towards the Irish language that we have seen here so often. Let us see the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee to discuss all these issues in a rational and respectful way. Tacaím leis an rún. I support the motion.

Mr McCausland: The proposal for an Ad Hoc Committee on these various issues is utterly unnecessary and completely unwarranted. There are some in the House who have a misunderstanding about the nature and constitutional position of Northern Ireland.

I listened on the television earlier to a contribution from the leader of the SDLP, Alasdair McDonnell, and, I think, another gentlemen called McDevitt, who probably sees himself as the leader-in-waiting. However, the two of them were making a contribution in regard to the nature of Northern Ireland, and they seemed to have this confusion that it was somehow like a hybrid state and not quite British; what was it? There was clearly a lack of understanding on their part.

The reality and the fact is that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. Her Majesty The Queen is the sovereign of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Other people may have long-term aspirations and hopes — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr McCausland: They may have long-term aspirations and hopes, but the difference is that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom is not some vague aspiration or some long-term hope or strategy. It is a current, present, constitutional reality.

The United Kingdom's flag is the Union flag. It is, therefore, the only flag that should have a proper place in this Building. So, questions around flags are unnecessary because the fact of the matter is that it is the flag of the United Kingdom and whether it be here at the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont or, indeed, at the City Hall, which is the main civic building in the capital city of this part of the United Kingdom, the flying of the Union flag is the right thing because it is simply a reflection and

representation of the constitutional reality of this part of the United Kingdom. It is not an aspiration. It is not about identity and culture, and so on. It is a reality.

3.15 pm

The second thing that was talked about was language. It is true that minority languages are part of the cultural heritage and cultural wealth of every country. The problem in regard to the Irish language is that, back in the early 1980s, at the time of the hunger strikes and soon after, when Sinn Féin started really stepping up its cultural war, we had a Sinn Féin publication that stated clearly that every word spoken in Irish was another bullet in the freedom struggle. That was talking about cultural war. It was not speaking about cultural wealth. I have never once heard any member of Sinn Féin stand up and say that what was put forward in that publication, which was the result of a seminar organised by cultural workers in Sinn Féin, was wrong. Sinn Féin has never disowned it, said that it got it wrong or apologised for it. Therefore, I can only assume that Sinn Féin still stands by the view that every word spoken in Irish is another bullet in the freedom struggle.

Sometimes people say that political traditions are not represented here and that we need to deal with symbols and emblems. They say that there is no reflection of Irish republicanism in this Building.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes, I will.

Mr Humphrey: I am pleased to hear what the Member is saying. I wanted him to give way so that he could get an extra minute.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for that help.

Two quick points. First, there is representation in this Building of Irish republicanism. Outside this room there is, inscribed on a wall, a commemoration to Edgar Graham, a member of the Ulster Unionist Party who was murdered by the Provisional IRA. If you go elsewhere in the Building, you will find that there is representation in a similar manner. We have to be quite frank about that today. If one is talking here about an inclusive society, a shared society and a forward-moving society, the people on the Benches opposite must indeed turn their back on the sort of thinking that led to the death of Edgar Graham and to people saying that Irish being spoken was another bullet in the freedom struggle.

The final thing I will say is this: when people talk about consensus, I find it really does cause me great concern. The people who are talking about consensus are the people who named a children's playground in the Newry and Mourne council area after an IRA terrorist. If that is seen as consensus, if that is seen as forward thinking, if that is seen as a shared future, it is indeed a very strange view, and one that the SDLP in particular, which backed the naming of —

Mr Speaker: Time is gone.

Mr McCausland: That is a very strange view of a shared future that it would put forward in our society, and certainly one that I could not subscribe to or understand.

Mr Speaker: I say to the whole House that I will not allow Members to abuse interventions to allow another Member an extra minute. Interventions should make a contribution to the debate and should be genuine interventions. I warn the whole House. I hope that I do not have to warn the Member again. Let us move on.

Ms Ruane: I was going to make a point of order on exactly the point of Mr Humphrey's abuse of —

Mr Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that.

Mr Elliott: Clearly the difficulties in the debate highlight the difficulties that there are here in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in this Assembly Chamber. They highlight the lengths and extent to which Sinn Féin will go to cause division and problems within the Chamber and within Northern Ireland. I think that we have to be honest and clear: Sinn Féin does not want to be part of the United Kingdom, as is its express right. However, there is no reason why Sinn Féin should try to implement that view on everybody else against the will of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It is absolute and sheer hypocrisy for Sinn Féin to come to this Chamber and tell us that they are true democrats. Earlier in the debate, I heard Ms Ruane say that she was a democrat and ask whether we were afraid of the debate. She said, "Bring it on." Why, then, for almost 40 years, did they murder the citizens of this Province? Is that democracy? I do not believe that it is. Does she believe that it is her right to impose the will of their people on the other people of Northern Ireland? No; it is not.

I listened to her talk about democracy. If she is so keen on democracy, why do Sinn Féin MPs not take up their seats in the house of democracy at Westminster and argue their case in the way everybody else does? No; they are afraid of it. I see Mr McCartney making his views known — not orally, but with signals and signs. That is the petty and low terminology and attempts that they are bringing to this debate and the Chamber. That is regrettable.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. Earlier, the proposer talked about us in the unionist community being able to celebrate our heroes. The heroes that republicans have are the likes of Hogan and Martin, who they commemorated in Dunloy, in my constituency, at the weekend. They were responsible for the murder of a British soldier. That is the type of heroes that the party opposite wants to emulate and put on a pedestal.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Elliott: I cannot disagree with the Member's sentiments. I do not know why we need an Ad Hoc Committee for this issue. We have a method and mechanism in the Assembly for dealing with it. Some Members from the parties opposite, and, indeed, the Alliance Party, have boycotted that process. That is some democracy. If they want to deal with the situation, let them deal with it through the proper mechanisms and processes that are already available in the Assembly. I recall —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: OK, if it is quick.

Mr Lyttle: Would you care to correct your last statement, given that the Alliance Party attended the most recent Commission meeting? You are continuing to peddle

inaccuracies, as has been the case on this issue for about the past two months.

Mr Elliott: Have they attended all the meetings of the Commission that were to deal with this? My understanding is that they have not. If Mr Lyttle wants to correct that, let him tell me.

I witnessed the work of an ad hoc committee that Sinn Féin set up in Fermanagh council many years ago to deal with emblems and artefacts in the council's chamber and buildings. They said that they wanted a neutral working environment. They got all those artefacts and emblems removed, but what have they done now? They have introduced Irish on the headed paper and the vehicles. Is that a neutral working environment for many unionists who do not want it? No; it is absolutely not, and it is despised by them. They have turned it from being —

Ms Ruane: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I have heard enough.

They have turned it from being what they said was not a neutral working environment for them, to a non-neutral working environment for unionists.

Quite often, I listen to them tell us about how great the Republic of Ireland is. The Republic of Ireland has its national flag, the Irish tricolour. When I am in the Republic of Ireland, I have no problem with it being flown there, because that is its national flag. If you look at the regulations there, you see that it is normal practice to fly the national flag on all military posts and from a number of important state buildings every day. So what is the difficulty with flying the Union flag, which is our national flag, in Northern Ireland? There should not be any problem. I accept the Irish tricolour in the Republic of Ireland. Why is the Union flag not acceptable in Northern Ireland?

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Member for giving way. The Health Committee visited the Irish Republic, and we saw its Parliament. There is a tricolour flying from not only the building, but there is one inside the Chamber at the right-hand side of the Speaker. We should be looking to see where ours is, when it comes to our Speaker. There are also three tricolours in the Upper House. We have nothing here to display the fact that we are British.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for that. There is a challenge for you, Mr Speaker. I look forward to the next time we are having a debate in the Chamber — we will have a Union flag in each corner.

I do not know why this motion was brought forward in the first place, and I do not support it. There are mechanisms for dealing with it. Let us get on and deal with it.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag caint ar son an mholta seo. I will speak in favour of the motion, which deals very clearly with a specific issue. Obviously, some Members have not even bothered to read it, given some of their interventions today. The motion deals with flags, emblems, symbols and language. It does not proscribe any language, symbol, emblem or flag. It just wants a discussion of all that. I am left wondering why anyone would fear that type of discussion. Maybe Members, in their contributions, will try to explain.

Tom Elliott has a peculiar definition of democracy when it suits him and in a particular sense. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: The core of democracy is to let the people decide. So when Sinn Féin stands for election, it is written in very large letters that we do not take our seats in Westminster. We deliver on that, and we adhere to it. Just remember that. That is the definition of democracy.

One reason why we think that an Ad Hoc Committee is the best way to deal with this comes from the Commission on 2 June 2000:

> *"The Commission agreed that the flags issue is a political matter best handled by the Assembly."*

So, in many ways, we are fulfilling the Commission's wishes. I will spare the blushes of those from the unionist parties who were on the Commission at that time. None of them said that flags should be dealt with by the Commission, only by the Commission and that that was what it was for. So what has changed in the meantime? We have got no explanation here today.

We have had a petition of concern on whether there should be open debate. Mr Poots was here, having taken time out of his very busy schedule as Health Minister to come to the debate, which is amazing in itself, although I notice that he is now absent. This time last week, Edwin Poots said that the petition of concern was abused. This week, we have the DUP, quite shamefacedly, using a petition of concern because it suits its very narrow grounds. *[Interruption.]* I pointed out last week — Mr McCrea is speaking from a sedentary position.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: Last week, I pointed out that we would be prepared to have an open discussion about the use of the petition of concern. It was used last week because there was an equality issue. This week, it is not being used for an equality issue. It is being used to run away from a decision, already taken by the Commission, that the matter should be dealt with as a political issue by the Assembly and, by extension, an Ad Hoc Committee.

When Mr Poots was speaking, there were great cheers from his colleagues. Indeed, the Chair of the Committee for Education, who is now absent, said that Caitríona Ruane brought legislation through the Assembly. She has not brought one piece of legislation through the Assembly as far as I am aware. Getting up and, if you like, flag-waving — dare I use that expression during this debate — to get a cheap cheer from the crowd does not serve the debate very well.

Again, it was great to see Nelson McCausland, a Minister who has a very heavy schedule and runs a very important Department, having time out to come to the debate. Many will ask whether all Executive Ministers have time to make contributions when there are 38 other Members in their parties, or are the big flag-wavers being brought out this afternoon? It was obvious from the Minister's contribution, and I have absolutely no doubt, that he was asked at the last minute — over lunchtime, perhaps — to drop in. Apart from his contribution being a series of incoherent points, the Minister was even prepared to use the death of an individual to score a very cheap and base point. He did not care who he used to do that. When we hear speeches

about concern for victims and the tragedy of the past 40 years, it rings hollow when Members come to the Chamber and use anything and any opportunity to score a very base political point. I say directly to that Minister: shame on you for doing that.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: Yes. I will give way.

3.30 pm

Mr McCausland: Somehow, it is all right for Ministers from Sinn Féin to turn up at Irish republican commemorations and eulogise and glorify Irish republican killers, but it is wrong for anyone else to refer to the victims of the people whom they eulogise.

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added to his time.

Mr McCartney: I thought that you were going to say — it would have been an interesting point — that maybe they had time to do that rather than fulfil their ministries. I note that you made no defence. You should be in your office; you should be running your Department — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to finish.

Mr McCartney: You should be running your Department and dealing with the issues that affect people's lives every day instead of running in here with a big flag and waving it at people — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr McCartney: I want to return to the topic of the debate: the need for an Ad Hoc Committee.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: I will make a final point. Perhaps I will get another cheer from the other side, which I hope that Hansard will record. No one should fear discussion.

Mr Weir: I cannot let go the remarks of the Member who spoke previously. Obviously, shame on a Minister for appearing in the Assembly in this debate rather than at a terrorist commemoration. Shame on that Minister for appearing in this Assembly debate. That is the level of hypocrisy from the other side.

I will deal with a few points that have been raised and explain why this is an unnecessary motion. As, I think, Tom Elliott pointed out, there a mechanism to deal with this: it is called the Assembly Commission. That is why a motion was legitimately tabled, dealt with and passed. Indeed, we managed to reach a situation in which —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly.

Mr McCartney: Previously, the Commission agreed:

> *"that the flags issue is a political matter best handled by the Assembly."*

Talk to your member on the Commission from that time and tell them that they were wrong.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Weir: The Member opposite can quote from 11 years ago. However, some of the Members opposite have a very short memory. The motion also deals with an Ad Hoc Committee for emblems and language policy. I am sure that this is no secret that I am revealing: this Thursday, when the Assembly Commission meeting takes place, there is an item on the agenda to deal with a draft language policy. Are we told that that is not a legitimate level of discussion for the Assembly Commission? Perhaps that should simply be put to an Ad Hoc Committee, as suggested. I wonder whether the Member opposite, as she has done on three previous occasions, will adopt some sort of hokey-cokey approach.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No. Quite frankly, I have heard enough from the honourable Member for South Down today.

Ms Ruane: You are afraid to debate.

Mr Weir: The Member says that we are afraid to debate. However, on the past three occasions when these very issues could have been debated in the Assembly Commission, she has been missing. The old line of running away seems to be particularly applicable today to the Member.

Flags, emblems and language are all matters that are being dealt with and have been dealt with by the Commission. In the past 12 months, we have been looking at the issue of emblems. As was indicated, we have had a number of sessions on language policy, and, indeed, we will look at that again this Thursday. As was indicated, provision has been made, and when there is genuine demand, that has been met.

I am grateful to one of the Members opposite who highlighted that, when a group makes a request to have a tour in Irish, that will be catered for. However, that is on the basis of demand. It is not on the basis of unnecessary expense for a political purpose. The great tidal wave of greater interest in the Irish language does not appear to be borne out by issues that were raised in the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure this week.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I am surprised to hear some of the Members across the way eulogising community support for the Irish language.

Last week, the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure was advised that a state-funded newspaper, 25% of which was funded by our Government and 75% by the Government of the Irish Republic, needed figures of 6,000 copies to be sold to break even. The peak that it reached was 1,500 copies. Frankly, €1·6 million for a publication that never left the dock is something that should be investigated by the House and by the Oireachtas in Dublin.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for that information. The reality is that the provision of services should be on the basis of need and not on the basis of political vanity projects that some of the Members opposite want to put in place.

At the heart of this, supposedly, is the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee. I have no problem with dealing with what needs to be dealt with in Parliament Buildings through the Assembly Commission. I think that there is a wider argument for work to be done by the party leaders to try to improve community relations. However, does

anybody in this House genuinely believe that, if a six-, eight- or 10-week Ad Hoc Committee deals with this issue through 11 Back-Bench Members, it will not generate more heat than light? We are going to be left with a situation, which, if anything, simply entrenches positions. That is one of my criticisms of an Ad Hoc Committee. I do not see any particular value coming from an Ad Hoc Committee; it would simply waste people's time and generate a greater degree of anger.

One of the other false assumptions that seems to lie at the heart of this is that Northern Ireland is some sort of condominium that is somewhere between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, one Member who is present said to me not that long ago that I may think that I am British, but that she knows that she is in Ireland. The reality — there has got to be a bit of a reality check among some of the Members opposite — is that the consent principle means that you are part of the United Kingdom. That needs to be reflected in the Chamber as much as anything else.

In conclusion, genuine debate can be had in the Assembly Commission about what the Building looks like and how we accommodate people in relation to that. We can never go down the line — I will certainly never permit it — of turning this from a Building that seems to be open to everyone and that draws groups from all sections of the community into something that is a cold house for many people in this community.

I first got involved in politics in the students' union at Queen's University. It was marked out by an aggressive Irish-language policy, and, for many years, it sent out a strong signal that the students' union and Queen's in general was not somewhere that was welcoming to the unionist community. That created a chill factor and a factor that said that one community need not attend. The reality is that there are some in the Chamber who would be happy for that to be replicated across Stormont. We have a Building that is welcoming to everyone. I believe that an Ad Hoc Committee is unnecessary.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Weir: Instead of running away from the Commission, I urge Members to attend it and to debate the issues where they should be debated. I urge Members to reject the motion.

Mr G Robinson: At the commencement of my contribution, let me make it clear that I am proud citizen of the United Kingdom. As such, I firmly believe that our nation's flag — the Union flag — should fly on all public buildings in Northern Ireland, including this Building. However, recent events have shown the world that some parties have demonised the Union flag while promoting the flying of a foreign flag. That is called hypocrisy.

I am saddened that our country's flag does not have its rightful permanent place flying over this Building. Yes — 365 days of the year. I also include in that British emblems and symbols that are housed in this Building.

In this Building, Ministers, regardless of what party they come from, carry out British parliamentary-style procedures and decide on local changes to British laws. That proposed legislation requires Royal Assent to become law, yet we cannot fly the national flag over the Assembly Building on a permanent basis. It saddens me that, although British rule and law is administered in this Building, the national flag is flown only on designated days to pander to the needs of some parties who want to achieve nothing else but the removal of a legitimate emblem of the United Kingdom.

As a unionist, I am not blind to the fact that this motion is a cynical attempt to hide the moves in Belfast City Hall and some other council-owned buildings throughout Northern Ireland. In my council in Limavady, the Union flag and other symbols, even a mug belonging to Princess Diana, were removed by the republican/nationalist bloc a few years ago, and that has caused great resentment in the unionist community ever since. Members should also remember the indefensible violent response that their actions in December provoked in the wider unionist community.

In my experience, people of all religious and political beliefs do not have a major problem with the flying of the Union flag, but they are perturbed that it has become a political football for the enemies of Ulster. I believe that it is a great sadness that a Committee such as the motion proposes is even mentioned, and I am sure that Members will understand why I cannot and will not support the motion. The Assembly Commission is the place where this topic needs to be debated.

Mr Lyttle: I certainly had hoped that the debate would be constructive, but I have to say that some of the disrespect that has been shown by DUP Members has been quite startling to many who contributed.

I sat as Chair of the — Would you let me speak? Please? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard. Continue.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you Mr Speaker.

I sat as Chair of the Assembly Business Trust last night with young directors from all across Northern Ireland, and one common, recurring question was why the economy is not top of our agenda and why we have not managed to deal with these types of issues and settle them. I think that it is clear by some Members' attitudes why it has been so difficult.

I will try to keep my comments as balanced and factual as possible, as I am acutely aware that the majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see leadership and solutions on these issues. The lack of leadership around flags and emblems has had brutal human and economic consequences for people and businesses across Northern Ireland in recent months. Unfortunately, this is a symptom of a wider issue of an incomplete peace process and a lack of delivery from the First Minister and deputy First Minister on an Executive regional shared future strategy for Northern Ireland, which they have now had over five years in office to deliver.

I believe firmly that having designated days is a balanced, mutually respectful and sustainable way to display the flag that represents the current constitutional status of this region. It not only reflects the constitutional status but respects that it does not represent the only national identity in Northern Ireland. This has been a longstanding position of the Alliance Party, which has been completely independent of other parties' positions. When required to show courage in standing for this shared future policy, we

have done so to the point of death threat and intimidation at our homes and workplaces.

It is perhaps important and useful to note that a recent poll found that 44% of people surveyed across Northern Ireland believed that designated days is the best policy for the respectful display of flags in our community.

We need mature and responsible leadership on these issues. As hard to believe as it may be, parties in this House have previously shown leadership on the issue. In response to the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000, which governed the display of the Union flag on government buildings, the Ulster Unionist Party said that by accepting the:

> *"legitimate expression of British identity through the flying of the flag on the 17 [flag-flying] days ... the SDLP and Sinn Féin will be honoring their obligation in the Belfast Agreement to show 'sensitivity' and 'promote mutual respect' rather than division."*

So, I am happy to give way and allow the Ulster Unionist Party Members to explain their dramatic U-turn that they made in their contributions earlier today on this clear policy. They may wish to do that and/or to clarify what seemed to be their advocating of flying the flag at Parliament Buildings on designated days.

That —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Certainly.

Mrs D Kelly: Would it surprise the Member to learn that many members of the Ulster Unionist Party in councils across the North of Ireland have supported flag-flying on designated days in local authority buildings?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for her contribution, and, indeed, I am trying to make the point that parties have shown leadership in putting forward balanced and respectful policies on these sensitive issues. I gave the Ulster Unionist Party an opportunity to clarify what its currently mixed policy position is on the issue. Its Members have not taken that opportunity. That, however, is perhaps no great surprise.

Unfortunately, for some reason, parties have U-turned on their positions, so instead we have had systematic campaigns of misrepresentation and intimidation that seem to continue to this day. I believe that this is a morally bankrupt politics of fear. I believe that the Northern Ireland public want to see positive politics that inspires and reassures people that they have a place in Northern Ireland.

I am willing to engage with anyone's legitimate concerns, and I will robustly test the motivation of other parties, but we must send out a clear message that there is nothing to fear from compromising and forming Ad Hoc Committees that allow us to look at these issues in a political manner. Given that the role of the Assembly Commission is to be impartial and not to act on behalf of political parties, the fact is that inequalities and fears over identity will never be addressed in the absence of engagement and the delivery of a shared future.

I believe that a balanced and positive expression of identity should be the aim of the Assembly and of Northern Ireland. Peace is the only way that we will lift communities out of disadvantage and into regeneration and economic growth, and to have designated days is a flags policy that is in line with the Belfast Agreement, and one that will give us the platform to move on the delivery of those economic issues.

3.45 pm

It is not neutrality. It is not joint authority, which I cannot imagine Sinn Féin or the SDLP wanting to see in a new united Ireland, for example. It is a balanced and respectful reflection of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

We have gone further than just resting on those issues. We have published a shared future strategy and put forward the constructive suggestion of a shared future reference group, which would have elected representatives working with civic society. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister seem to have declined that constructive suggestion. Two years after the initial draft of the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Lyttle: — it is clear that the Assembly needs to do much more to deal with the issues and to allow us to build the shared and better future that we want for Northern Ireland.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I did not intend to speak to the motion, but I have been following the debate while being involved in other business about the Building.

We are discussing a proposal to establish an Ad Hoc Committee — a proposal that, amazingly, attracted a petition of concern. We are talking about an Ad Hoc Committee here. It is that reaction — in my view, with respect, an overreaction — that we should really focus on.

I listened to the contributions, and some Members appear to have difficulty addressing the role and purpose of the Ad Hoc Committee or, indeed, the reasons that the proposition emerged. It was proposed not least to resolve a flags protocol but also to avoid contaminating or polluting the role of the Commission, which is meant to be a neutral body that oversees the —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Yes, OK.

Mr Allister: Is not the real reason that the motion was proposed because if the matter stays within the Assembly Commission, its decisions are unchallengeable by a petition of concern? Sinn Féin fears democracy in the Assembly Commission, so it wants to put the matter into an Ad Hoc Committee, the decisions of which, if it loses in that debate, can be blocked by a petition of concern. Is that not the real truth of what Sinn Féin is at?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you very much. I suppose that inadvertently, because I am not sure that he was intending to support my argument, Mr Allister has actually proved my argument. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: By taking the matter into the Commission, with its inbuilt majority and its different means of arriving at decisions, in fact what we see is

an attempt to impose a unionist proposal on the entire Assembly. I want to go back to the origins of this — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I think that many of the Members who spoke completely overlooked this particular important point. There was sufficient notice for people to have thought their way into the proposition when it was initially brought to the attention of Belfast City Council, over a year ago now. As it went through the various mechanisms, people had plenty of time to consider their options.

The option that was eventually selected was not Sinn Féin's preference but a compromise position. I wonder why unionists, who, all along, had accepted the designated-days formula for here, did not give a credible explanation of why they needed a 365-days policy or why they did not move before the Alliance Party moved to the idea —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. So that he is left in absolutely no doubt, the leader of the Sinn Féin group in the City Hall made it very clear — it was streamed, so anyone can watch it — that Sinn Féin's voting to place the flag on the pole on designated days was a tactical move. It was nothing to do with any policy or principle: it was a tactical move. Let us have consistency in the message. Let us have no spin when you are misleading the House.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I reject any allegation that I am misleading the House. I am speaking to the record, and I pose the question that you also avoided: why did it not occur to unionists that there was an available compromise? We could have avoided all the division, all the schisms, all the disturbances and all the disruption that we have had since.

Is there no flexibility, no imagination, no creativity?

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: OK, Trevor.

Mr Clarke: How can the Member suggest a compromise from 365 days down to 18, given that the majority of Northern Ireland — 56% of the population — is from the unionist persuasion? How is that a compromise?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I harbour the hope and the expectation that unionists, whatever the position — and I will accept, for the sake of the proposition, 54%. What responsibility are they going to show for the 46% of people who have a different perspective? That is what this comes down to; that is the nub of it. Three hundred and sixty five days of flying the Union flag did not acknowledge that there was any other diversity, any other opinion or any other allegiances in our society. That was a proposal and a policy that should, and must, be challenged wherever it appears.

Even at this late hour — and I know that there is a petition of concern in relation to this — the idea of taking this into the Commission, with its inbuilt unionist majority, is simply digging the hole deeper. The hole is deep enough as it is. There was an available compromise, which you ignored.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go ahead, Colum.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member is a former member of Derry City Council, and one of his former colleagues is Mr Gregory Campbell. No flag flies on that council building. Does the Member think for one second that Mr Campbell feels any less British every time he walks through the halls of the Guildhall?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I suppose that it would be something to look forward to if we had an acknowledgement from Mr Campbell, but we will not get that today either, I expect.

I want to finish on this point, because I am running out of time. It is important that we recognise that there is more than one tradition and more than one aspiration in this community, and we represent them all. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: In introducing the debate, Ms Ruane read excerpts from the Good Friday Agreement. She and a number of other contributors acknowledged the requirements to promote equality, parity of esteem and good relations, and recognised the diversity that makes up the modern Northern Ireland. I, too, wish to refer to a previous document, which is the definition, if you like, or the mission statement by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland:

> *"Our vision for Northern Ireland is of a peaceful society in which everyone can freely and fully participate, achieve their full potential, and live free from poverty. We want a fair and effective system of government, underpinned by rights that are guaranteed for all, and responsibilities that all must share. We wish to support dialogue, and to foster mutual understanding and respect for diversity."*

I have to say that the debate, and the contributions of many Members this afternoon, does not fulfil those aspirations. As a mother of four — my youngest daughter is 19 and my eldest 28 — I, like many other parents across the North, despair at today's debate in light of the continuing job losses in this region.

In his contribution, Mr Lyttle told us the how the young directors asked last night why the economy is not at the heart of debate today. It is because of a number of reasons. At the beginning of this Assembly term, the First Minister said that the Assembly and the Executive would be judged on delivery over the next four years. Almost two years into this term, what has been delivered? Again, we are debating flags and emblems, and the methodology of dealing with it in an Ad Hoc Committee was precisely because, as Mr Lyttle and others pointed out —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: Not yet. The failure of many — of OFMDFM — in actually producing a cohesion, sharing and integration strategy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: Many Members have rightly highlighted that the work of the Committee is not about the politics of flags and emblems. It is the work of all of us, but most especially those in leadership positions around the Executive table.

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will not give way just yet, but I will do so during the course of the debate.

We need to take a step or two back. Why are we having this debate today at this time, when the recession is still biting and when job losses are continuing to increase? We are having this debate because Peter Robinson never got over losing the East Belfast seat to Naomi Long. Mr Speaker, 40,000 leaflets were issued across Belfast — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order

Mrs D Kelly: — because of Peter Robinson's failure to win that seat. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: That brought protestors and violence onto the streets of the North, and 152 police officers were injured. Did Peter Robinson show a lead by standing by Martin McGuinness's side to condemn that violence? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: No, he did not. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: The boys in the playground opposite have yet to tell —

Mr Anderson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not persist. It is quite obvious that the Member does not want to give way at this minute in time. *[Interruption.]* Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mrs D Kelly: The boys across the way are going to have to listen for once in their lives. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: Mr Speaker, many Members have referred to the Good Friday Agreement. I was filled with dismay to hear Gregory Campbell say that it is a redundant document. Shame on him. He is deluding himself and the people whom he represents, because the DUP's very presence in this Chamber acknowledges the institutions that were set up under the Good Friday Agreement. This place would not be in existence were it not for the DUP's tacit engagement with and participation in the institutions.

The Good Friday Agreement was amended by the DUP, in cahoots with the British and Irish Governments and, to some extent, Sinn Féin, to get the St Andrews Agreement. So, de facto, through the very presence and reality of the St Andrews Agreement, the DUP has accepted the Good Friday Agreement. It is about time that Peter Robinson and those in the leadership positions of the DUP told their Back-Benchers what that means. It means parity of esteem. It means equality. It means —

Mr Speaker: Order. I said earlier in the debate that it is important that Members, in whatever they say, link their words to the original motion. I am listening to the Member as she sums up. It is important that we try to come back to the motion as far as possible.

Mrs D Kelly: The reason why I referred specifically to the Good Friday Agreement is the failure and contributions of many Members opposite. They are deluding themselves and the communities that they represent. The Good Friday Agreement exists and is here to stay, so get over it. Get over it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: No, I will not give way just yet. There is plenty of time for that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not persist.

Mrs D Kelly: A number of contributors talked about the position of the Assembly Commission. We, as an Assembly, ought to protect the Commission's position and authority and its roles and responsibilities. We should not put an issue as toxic as flags and emblems into that forum. There are other forums already in existence to deal with that agenda item. There is the cohesion, sharing and integration strategy and the First Minister and deputy First Minister's sitting with their colleagues around the Executive table.

As other Members have pointed out, it is very disheartening that, when Ministers have spoken as ordinary Assembly Members —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I want to make this point.

I defend Ministers' right to do so. Nonetheless, they are working the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement in their ministerial positions. That is what they are doing. They are Ministers under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

I will give way.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way eventually.

You referred to parity of esteem. Will you refer to parity of esteem in respect of your colleague sitting behind you, who carried the coffin of a paramilitary ex-terrorist, terrorist or whatever you wish to call him; the naming of a park after a terrorist — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Clarke: — and the continual campaign in respect of —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard.

Mr Clarke: — the freeing of Marian Price and Gerry McGeough?

4.00 pm

Mrs D Kelly: The Member opposite did not use the example of John Hume, who said that you cannot eat a flag. As he well knows, that is a reality for many people today, with child poverty increasing in this area — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: Child poverty in this region is among the highest. Mr Speaker, are my constituency offices a place apart from the constituency offices of Members opposite? We have people coming in because there is not enough social housing available to them; people are losing their jobs and their benefits are being removed. I hear shouting from the background. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: One of the points that I wish to make is that part of the issue around this is that there has been a failure to deal not only with building a shared future, but with the past. The SDLP has always called for that and said that we must deal with the past on an ethical and moral basis. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: We are not afraid of that. We are up for that challenge, and I hope that other parties will stand with us.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I have finished, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that the vote will be on a cross-community basis.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 46.

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

Total Votes	*94*	*Total Ayes*	*48*	*[51.1%]*
Nationalist Votes	*40*	*Nationalist Ayes*	*40*	*[100.0%]*
Unionist Votes	*46*	*Unionist Ayes*	*0*	*[0.0%]*
Other Votes	*8*	*Other Ayes*	*8*	*[100.0%]*

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Agnew.

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Education: Entitlement Framework Funding and Strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds

Mr Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is the motion on the — order, Members — entitlement framework funding and strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. I ask Members to leave the Chamber quietly. I ask the Clerk to read the motion. *[Interruption.]*

4.15 pm

Mr Gardiner: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, please ask the Clerk to read the motion again. There was so much noise, and it did not deliver down here. It was not his fault but that of Members making such an uproar going out. If he could read it again, I would very much appreciate it.

Mr Speaker: The wording is on the Order Paper. I apologise to the Member and to other Members who are not hearing the proceedings. There may be an issue around that, which we will look at. I appreciate what the Member is saying.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly, in light of recommendation 9 of the review of the common funding scheme and the concerns being expressed by schools and further education colleges, calls on the Minister of Education to extend the funding earmarked for the entitlement framework to the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years; and further calls on the Minister of Education to work with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a common funding approach for all pupils and students within a coherent strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds.*

In moving the motion, I acknowledge the announcement that the Minister of Education made last week on the provision of an additional £9·9 million to assist schools in the fulfilment of their obligations under the entitlement framework. The Minister will have to excuse my suspicion that this announcement may have some connection with this debate. It will not have escaped the Assembly's attention that, when a motion on education is tabled by the DUP, a ministerial statement or an announcement on the matter is issued shortly before the debate. No doubt, he will deny it, and if it had happened once, I would not have thought any more of it. However, when these coincidences keep occurring, such as with debates tabled on GCSEs and school leadership, it becomes increasingly hard to ignore. To misquote Oscar Wilde: to issue one statement may be regarded as misfortune, to issue two looks like carelessness, but to issue three looks like implementing DUP policy. In fact, I am tempted to table a motion on academic selection to see whether the Minister will be spurred into action.

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

Despite the Minister's announcement, there is still plenty to debate. The key objective of the entitlement framework is to improve equality of access for all young people, regardless of where they live or the sector in which they are educated to a broadly balanced and more

economically relevant curriculum with clear progression pathways. This motion was tabled after it became clear from the Minister's savings delivery plan that, in 2013-14, only £5·2 million would be available to schools to meet the requirements under the entitlement framework and that, in 2014-15, that would reduce to nothing. To put this into context: schools were provided with £11·3 million in 2011-12. This has the potential to cause massive problems for schools and eat into their already stretched delegated schools budgets. Even following the Minister's announcement, schools are to receive £8·2 million in 2013-14 and £6·9 million the following year, which may be difficult to manage. This money is required to ensure that schools comply with their obligations under the entitlement framework, which means that a school must offer a minimum number of subjects at Key Stage 4 and post-16. It was recognised in the Salisbury report, which was published last month, that schools were struggling financially to meet those obligations, and as a result of this, recommendation 9 of his report suggested:

> *"To allow schools to fulfil the requirements of the Entitlement Framework in the short to medium term, the Department of Education should consider extending earmarked entitlement framework funding at its current level for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years."*

Unfortunately, despite an announcement that sounds so pleased with itself, the amounts on offer still fall very short of what was recommended by the Salisbury report and, I must presume, of what is required for schools to meet their statutory requirements. It is unfortunate that the announcement was not made earlier, as many schools may have already finished their curriculum for next year, to allow young people and their parents to make informed choices about their future.

The situation throws up a number of questions that I would like the Minister to answer. What has persuaded the Minister that the amount that he has announced is sufficient to cover the needs that are identified in the Salisbury report, which recommended maintaining funding at its current level rather than reducing it?

What will happen to schools that are unable to meet their statutory obligations due to decreased funding? If the schools have been unable to complete the transaction up to this point, can they be expected to do so within the next two years? Does the Minister have a contingency plan? A further question that I would like the Minister to address is: can we be satisfied that the entitlement framework is a suitable model for schools?

I will move on to the thorny issue of a coherent strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds. I can only call it "thorny", because there seems to have been a U-turn away from the policy of the previous Sinn Féin Minister of Education on this matter. A 2009 letter from Caitríona Ruane advised us that a working group on qualifications at 14-19 had been established in September 2008, with a commitment to work closely with the Department for Employment and Learning to further develop a 14-19 strategy. The Department's website says:

> *"The Department of Education ... and the Department for Employment and Learning ... are working conjointly to bring forward a co-ordinated programme of provision for 14-19 year olds."*

However, when is a strategy not a strategy? When it is a "co-ordinated programme of provision", because in January this year the current Minister wrote to the Education Committee stating:

> *"I would like to clarify that the Department has no plans to publish a 14-19 Education Strategy."*

So, in the context of the entitlement framework, it would make enormous sense to publish such a strategy. It would provide the structure to allow a joined-up approach to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. The current funding structure does not allow a sufficient crossover. Although the independent panel behind the Salisbury report would prefer to see a school estate that could offer the breadth of courses that are specified in the entitlement framework, there is an admission that this cannot be an immediate reality and that such a change to the school estate could take some considerable time.

The reality is, therefore, that further education colleges, which fall under the Minister for Employment and Learning's remit, with their state-of-the-art facilities and specialist lecturers, are best placed to offer many of those courses. It appears inconceivable in the light of that reality that a strategy is no longer contemplated. Such a strategy could provide a means of giving protection to rural schools in the light of the reduction in funding, and it is those schools, which this Assembly has recognised on numerous occasions as important to rural communities, that potentially struggle most under the entitlement framework where transport costs, pupil numbers and the cost of provision of subjects are concerned.

The strategy could also look at small sixth forms. It is recognised by the independent panel, and generally accepted, that there are too many small sixth forms. However, will it be possible to operate large sixth forms without the excessive use of transport in rural areas? Given the reduction in funding, can those sixth forms continue, and what impact will that have on those rural communities? Conjoined thinking and a clear strategy could help not only in addressing the problems but in dealing with the fears of schools and pupils.

The disparity in costs of the provision of subjects between schools and further education colleges could also be addressed. The panel also noted that issue. The panel recommends that the Department of Education considers, with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the potential for joint funding arrangements for all 16- to 19-year-olds. I feel that this does not go far enough, and such arrangements should be considered for all 14- to 19-year-olds as part of a 14-19 strategy.

Sadly, the panel chose not to allocate additional funding for the provision of applied or vocational courses for fear that it may encourage further duplication of provision and, in particular, encourage schools to replicate the specialist provision of further education colleges. However, a strategy may well address some of those issues.

Such a strategy could also address issues on special educational needs (SEN) provision. The SEN framework, operated by the Department of Education (DE), makes schools and the education and library boards responsible for identifying, assessing and making provision for pupils with special educational needs up to the age of 16. That is the situation unless that pupil has a statement of SEN, in

which case the statement can then be maintained until the end of the academic year when the young person reaches 19 years of age. A smooth transition is required when that young person leaves the school system and becomes the responsibility of DEL from age 16 onwards, and a coherent strategy could deal with that. Furthermore, the needs that should be addressed while such young people are availing themselves of services at further education colleges as a result of the entitlement framework could also form part of that combined strategy.

Will the Minister once again clarify whether there will be a strategy arising out of the co-ordinated programme provision between DE and DEL? Will he advise what happened between the 2009 letter of his predecessor and his letter of January 2013 that resulted in the decision not to progress with the conjoined strategy? Will he provide more detail on the working group referred to by his predecessor and advise when the group ceased meeting and what happened to its recommendation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Miss M McIlveen: At present, there is no clear direction of GCSE and GCE, and we have talked before about clear pathways. We need to be aware of the requirements of the workforce, the economy and universities, and whether we are meeting those requirements. That should form part of the basis of a coherent strategy, and currently we are seeing little evidence —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Miss M McIlveen: — of joined-up thinking between DE and DEL to deliver real outcomes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Miss M McIlveen: That situation needs to change.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Members opposite for bringing the motion to the House.

I commend the Education Minister for announcing a further £9·9 million to extend the entitlement framework support funding in 2014-15. As the Member opposite said, it will help ensure that schools deliver a wide range of courses applicable to each student's ability and needs going into Key Stage 4 and post-16. Regardless of what school or background they come from, pupils will have the same access to the opportunities presented by an increased number of courses.

Young people need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge that will help them with the skills that they need to compete for apprenticeships and other jobs. They need to be provided with the same support to give them the confidence, skills and experience to compete in the labour market.

The 18 new courses at Key Stage 4 for 2013-14, moving towards 24 courses in 2015-16, and the 21 courses for post-16 for 2013-14, moving towards 27 courses in 2015-16, will help maximise and improve educational attainment, which is vital to helping build a world-class skills base here. Skills have the potential to transform lives by transforming life chances and driving social mobility. However, I believe that schools need to have robust, well-informed careers information and guidance, as that is critical to successful progression pathways.

I have spoken with many young people in my constituency who say that they made the wrong choices in the courses that they took owing to the lack of good advice and information on the subject and where it would lead them and on whether the courses were required for entry to certain other courses and colleges. Schools' careers advisers and external advisers should work in partnership with one another, pupils, parents and those with parental responsibility.

I am aware that a number of partnership agreements are in place with careers teams and schools. However, how is that working and how is it being benchmarked? How do we know that it is working to the advantage of the pupils? It is widely researched that good careers advice will help reduce drop-out levels in further and higher education courses and training.

Our economy demands a flexible and skilled workforce fit for the 21st century. I urge both Ministers and their respective Departments — DE and DEL — to re-evaluate the guidance given to Key Stage 4 and post-16 pupils to ensure that the courses are matched to the needs of the labour market and, in particular, within sectors of growth for the economy so that pupils can make informed choices to suit their ability and needs, know that the courses that they undertake are the right ones for them and be aware of what is available to them.

Area learning communities assist schools in reducing their costs, and they share expertise. I believe that that is good practice. I, along with other members of the Education Committee, had the privilege of attending one such area learning community in Limavady, where schools from different sectors come together to share classes and courses. Not only are the children getting the opportunity to work in partnership, but they are also working educationally across the religious divide.

4.30 pm

The Department does not allocate specific funding for area learning communities but to the schools within them under the local management of the schools. I would like to hear from the Minister how many schools in the North are actively participating in area learning communities. I believe that schools working collectively offer more choice to young people and open up wider opportunities for them going into employment.

That highlights the need for closer co-operation and collaboration between both Ministers in the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education in order to explore a common approach for all pupils aged 14 to 19, as further education has a key role to play in opening up access to higher-level skills to individuals from backgrounds with historically lower rates of participation. I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I, too, welcome the motion. I especially welcome the call to extend the funding earmarked for the entitlement framework and the call to formulate a common funding approach for all pupils and students within a coherent 14-19 strategy. Those are two very good points, but it is sad that today's debate has been undermined by the announcement last week. Yet, I welcome the £3 million and £6·5 million that are being offered to help out with the payment of making the entitlement framework work. It is extremely welcome, but it makes me wonder whether the

two parties are working well together and playing off on each other, or is it just good politics? I would like to think that it is the latter.

On the one hand, it is good news, but it is too late for many schools that have already planned their cuts. My colleague Jo-Anne Dobson will go into that a bit more in a few minutes. We welcome the entitlement framework and the breadth of its subjects, but we struggle to understand how it fits in with all the other changes that are being put into education.

To be able to afford the entitlement framework, we need large schools, which, at the moment, we do not have that many of, and we probably will not have in the future. Depending on what happens in this thing, we may not have the scale of those schools in the future. So, we do need funding; not just short term for the next two or three years, but a dynamic system of putting funding in place well into the future.

On the other hand, it could mean that we need to cause schools to share skills better, and to share facilities. That, of course, is welcome, especially in line with the Ulster Unionist policy of trying to achieve a single, shared education system into the future.

We recently saw in an answer to a question from me that the area learning communities cost some £10·7 million a year, with just over £1 million being spent in Newry and Mourne and just £90,000 being spent in south-west Belfast. That is not to say that one is better than the other, but it shows how diverse the use of funding is in pushing the area learning communities towards helping each other. We like the idea, and we like the broad curricula, but we do not want to see it being used for the comprehensivisation of our schools or taking away from achieving shared education.

With so much change ongoing, we need more dynamic funding. As I have said, we know that Sinn Féin wants the comprehensivisation of all schools. That means large schools and a broad entitlement framework, but we must take care that we are not sleepwalking into something that most of us do not want.

The second part of the motion calls for a common funding approach and a coherent strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds. I ask the Minister whether he has put someone in charge of pulling together all those points. Some extremely good points were made by the proposer. We need a coherent strategy, and we long to see Northern Ireland not just as the powerhouse of the UK or Europe, but actually producing people for the whole world. It does need someone to pull it all together.

This entitlement framework is one area where we are drifting like a rudderless ship in a sea of far too many changes, especially where there is a lack of an agreed cross-party way forward. So, once again, I call on the Minister to work with other parties to produce that long-term way forward. The spirit of the Belfast Agreement was consensus and not this deal-or-no-deal sort of system that we have.

The House and all of us pulling together can do much better, so I welcome the motion. Many of the symptoms within it, though, concern me. I may be wrong, but let us see our whole education system being pulled together. I support the motion.

Mr Rogers: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion but am disappointed that the SDLP amendment, which put a stronger emphasis on the necessity for a 14 to 19 education strategy, was not accepted, although I accept that the idea of "a coherent strategy" is mentioned in the motion.

I welcome the extra funding to ensure the delivery of the entitlement framework, albeit that it is insufficient to meet the Salisbury requirements. However, where is the strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds' education? That is essential if we are to meet the needs of our young people and our economy, by offering them, wherever they go to school, a wide and better-balanced range of courses that are relevant to their needs, aptitudes, interests and their job prospects. Every pupil is different and choices should reflect each young person's interests and aspirations.

Many young people — and, indeed, parents — underestimate the importance of choice at the end of Key Stage 3, a choice that may significantly impact on their careers. What do you say to a person in their late teens who has insufficient science or foreign language experience to pursue a particular course of study?

High-quality careers education, information and guidance are essential during Key Stage 3 and right through their time at school so that they can make an informed choice, leading to the most appropriate route for them. It is about schools, as well as young people and their parents, having high aspirations and then achieving them.

The entitlement framework gives young people the opportunity at the age of 14 and 16 to pursue different pathways, in their own or other schools or in further education colleges. Many students choose the traditional route with the same school from the age of 11 to 16 or 11 to 18, but I have seen the real benefits of the flexibility that entitlement framework funding creates in my constituency in the Downpatrick and Newry and Mourne learning partnerships.

When a young person is engaged in their own learning and can see the relevance of what they are doing in school and college and what the progression pathways can lead to for their future, they are more likely to achieve and focus in the short- and long term, and more likely to progress into higher education, training or employment.

I was particularly impressed on a recent visit to the South Eastern Regional College, Downpatrick, when I observed three groups who took an alternative route post-16: a pet care course that young people were using as preparation for pursuing a course in veterinary nursing or equine studies; an ICT course that at the end of two years provided them with the necessary skills and qualifications to enter the world of work or third-level study; or a hair and beauty course that gave them the skills to set up their own business or enter the hotel leisure industry. Those young people knew why they were doing their respective courses and had their plans well mapped out. It is important to mention that further education (FE) colleges feel left out of the area-based planning process.

The entitlement framework and associated funding has many other benefits, including opportunities for shared education and helping the transition from school to third-level study. Having to go to another school or college helps to build independent living skills that are essential at third level.

It is important that parents are encouraged to aspire to a better education and future for their children. Parental involvement and encouragement, no matter how small, can have a direct and long-term effect on a child's educational achievement. It must be made clear to parents that, no matter what your background, your child can achieve educationally and improve life. That real parental engagement is needed through the strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds.

Young people with special educational needs need to have the same opportunities within the 14 to 19 curriculum, whether they decide to stay on at school or attend a further education college. I was assured by the Minister this morning that rurality will be an important factor as we plan. A Member said earlier that this entitlement framework and the curriculum strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds is an important aspect to maintaining rural schools.

In conclusion, I support the motion. It is about quality and coherence of provision through a 14-19 education strategy that meets the needs of all our young people and properly prepares them for a life of work in the 21st century.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. Before I continue, I must say that I was utterly enchanted by Michelle McIlveen's introduction to the debate. I am sure that Oscar Wilde is up there somewhere having a quiet smile. He probably would have used the same words himself.

Michelle referred to the coincidence of the Minister pre-empting the debate by announcing a funding increase in advance of it. It must be the first time a Minister has dealt with half of a motion without getting to his feet. If a motion comes forward from the Alliance Party looking for a 200% increase in funding for integrated schools, it will be pure coincidence.

Because the Minister has so adequately dealt with the first half of the motion, I will speak on the second point on common funding and the needs of 14- to 19-year-olds. Obviously, I support that part of the motion. There is a recognised and significant problem here. Too often, as we all know, 16- to 19-year-olds in particular are perceived to fall between the cracks and out of the system. Although that is beginning to change, there is still a lot of work to do.

The motion refers to a "coherent strategy"; I would perhaps use the word "flexible" but we can use both. We need a flexible strategy that provides real choice and flexibility of movement, post 16, between schools and further education colleges. Such a strategy could usefully tie in with existing education strategies, such as area planning, and Mr Rogers mentioned the desire and the need for FE colleges to be involved in that process. Parents and young people should be well placed to make that choice and to benefit from that flexibility after GCSEs.

Another issue, which we have talked about before and is particularly applicable here, is our current unwillingness to reflect on the vocational value of courses, primarily those offered by FE colleges. The whole system, from transfer test onwards, assumes that a specifically academic route is good and that a vocational — what we used to call technical — route is something else; I will not use the word "bad", but it is seen as somehow inferior.

Such a value judgement is wrong and flawed, and it is every bit as wrong and flawed at 16 as it would be at 11. In fact, there is an excellent case for the argument that more people in Northern Ireland should choose the college route at 16. Colleges are generally much better at incorporating professional input — for example, from industry — into their courses, making those courses more directly applicable to the workplace.

Although the interface between colleges and the workplace is generally sound, we need to improve the interface between schools and FE colleges. Colleges should not be seen as backstop options or a last-chance saloon, but as the preferred option for those looking at careers in industry and the like.

I wonder whether the proposers of the motion are equally content with all the recommendations in the common funding scheme — the Salisbury document. I think we all accept that concerns are being expressed by schools and FE colleges. On the same basis, I suppose that some schools would take issue with what I am saying about colleges being better linked to the real world of the modern workplace.

It strikes me that there is an issue for teachers as well. Again, I would like some consideration to be given to that by the proposers of the motion and the Minister. Within a coherent strategy and common funding approach for students there would, presumably, be a need for a common funding approach for teachers.

That raises additional issues. It seems to me that, for various reasons, the school teaching profession and the college tutoring profession are regarded as entirely distinct from each other. There is a case for a bit more parity of esteem, which we hear a lot about in this House, in that area.

Finally, I wish to introduce into the debate the tracking aspect of the not in employment, education or training (NEET) strategy. I said at the outset that too many people in their late teens fall through the cracks. For many, it can be a particularly vulnerable age. It is essential that we know who and where they are, and that they know what options they have.

In the previous debate, we heard a lot about the need to discuss real issues like education, the economy, the health service — you name it. That was referred to over and over again. I will not count, but there were 94 MLAs here for that vote, and there are about 16 here now for this important issue. I will leave that thought with you.

4.45 pm

Mrs Hale: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on my party's motion, which is very timely, given the Minister's statement earlier today.

I welcome the news that the Education Minister is to allocate £9·9 million to help schools and colleges to deliver the entitlement framework, but it comes as no surprise that the announcement comes on the back of pressure by the DUP.

Although the additional funding is welcome, it is fair to say that it is only a drop in the ocean. Many schools and colleges still express concerns that, if the common funding scheme is not extended to the longer term, many pupils and, indeed, small local communities, will suffer. Many principals of small rural schools, who do an excellent job, may conclude that the Salisbury report 's recommendations to change the common funding scheme will lead to the removal of pupils from their schools to

larger schools, in which similar or better educational outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

I have genuine worries that the current review could mean the eradication of small rural schools in favour of large schools in more urban areas. Although there is an acceptance that the funding should be spent where there is need and that certain pupils may need additional resources, I strongly believe that changes to the common funding scheme must be based on an economic case that can show that there will be better educational outcomes for all pupils. That is why the funding for 2013-14 and 2014-15 has to be extended, allowing for a proper debate based on actual models rather than hypothetical outcomes.

My party colleague Mr Mervyn Storey raised a valuable point in the Education Committee. He highlighted the fact that there was no empirical data to prove that larger schools with bigger budgets can provide better educational outcomes for pupils, but that is where the Minister hopes to save large amounts of money.

Another area of contention is the use of free school meals as an indicator in the common funding scheme and, consequently, the delivery of the entitlement framework. I am aware that the uptake of free school meals in a number of post-primary schools in my constituency, which serve some deprived areas, can be as low as 10%. It does not equate to the reality of what is happening. It is also the case that many rural families who may be classed as living in affluent areas feel that the take-up of free school meals would cause isolation and stigmatisation in their community. It is evident that little thought has been given to considering other criteria, such as education maintenance allowance (EMA) uptake, social deprivation, rural poverty statistics, Department for Social Development (DSD) funding and community need. The list goes on.

Today's debate shows that the Minister needs to rethink certain aspects of the common funding scheme, a point that the DUP raised at Committee and in the House. He must commit to working in an open and transparent manner regarding his Department's savings delivery plans and ensure that his discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning lead to a viable and, indeed, workable 14- to 19-year-old framework that will prepare all our young people for a fluid and unpredictable labour market.

I support the motion.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like everybody else, I welcome the motion and congratulate the Minister on his decision in recent weeks to invest an additional £10 million to help local schools to fulfil their requirements under the entitlement framework.

In recent years, successive Sinn Féin Education Ministers have initiated a broad range of reforms, with an emphasis on ensuring that all our young people leave school with the skills and training required to meet the employment demands of a rapidly changing world. For too long, education provision was planned in an unco-ordinated and bottom-up way, through which the market demands of individual institutions triumphed over the educational needs of the child. Thankfully, however, we now see the building blocks of a system that delivers quality learning while guaranteeing an equitable and more relevant curriculum choice.

Central to this evolution in education provision have been the revised curriculum and the entitlement framework, which, in tandem, have developed key skills, increased access and choice for all pupils and empowered our young people to make informed decisions about their future.

Through the entitlement framework, young people have access to a far wider range of subjects and are now able to choose a mix that best suits their personal needs, not the perceived needs of the institution. Now, academic courses can be integrated with challenging professional and technical courses. That provides a much better base for many future third-level entrants, and, increasingly, the courses are focused on the requirements of a globalised economy.

Moreover, the entitlement framework ensures the capacity to deliver high-quality professional and technical pathways, again accessed by choice and available through modern organisational flexibility. Above all, it ensures that all our young people enjoy parity of esteem. For the first time, all, not just some, children will be helped to realise their full potential. Academic excellence can still be cherished in our system while ensuring that different pathways are kept open for all children at every possible point.

A LeasCheann Comhairle, at a time when educational discourse is saturated with the issue of underachievement and, more specifically, the ongoing underachievement of those who are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, the importance of the entitlement framework cannot be overstated. With a focus on every young person achieving his or her full potential, from every sector and every background, the entitlement framework will ensure that all pupils will stay engaged in their own learning process. As a result, they will see the relevance of their educational journey, thus increasing their appetite to achieve long-term progression into higher education, training or employment.

If we bear in mind the need to tackle educational underachievement while making the best use of available resources, the Minister's decision to commission a review of the common funding formula was necessary, and the recommendations may help to drive sustainable educational excellence for many years to come. The proposed new formula is not only fair but more accessible and transparent. It comprises seven core principles, and the emphasis will finally be on pupil entitlement with additional premiums that reflect pupil needs. Ultimately, the new formula lays down the foundations for changes that will benefit all young people.

As the Audit Office report illustrated last week, educational underachievement exists largely in communities that suffer social disadvantage. Therefore, it is imperative that resources are directed to the schools that service the communities that suffer most from such deprivation. In light of that, I welcome recommendation 18, which calls for increased funding for socio-economic deprivation to be weighted towards schools with such significant concentrations of disadvantage.

As I outlined at the outset, the decision to extend the entitlement framework funds, as recommended by Bob Salisbury's report, is a welcome step. There is no doubt that it will go some way to ease the budget pressures faced by local schools. I also welcome the fact that the Minister of Education is committed to working closely with

his colleague Minister Farry to ensure that the needs of all our young people are equitably met in the years ahead.

The entitlement framework and, indeed, the common funding review are examples of how we can raise standards and target social need. I welcome the fact that the House supports those two initiatives. I look forward to working with all sides of the House to ensure that we continue to tackle educational underachievement as we build a truly world-class education system.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the proposers for bringing the motion to the House, although I note with interest that, as my colleagues and others outlined, issues have moved ahead in that regard since the motion was tabled initially. Schools are broadly supportive of the overall aims of the entitlement framework, but they are continually hampered in its delivery because of budget cuts and the resulting difficult decisions that need to be made. We have discussed the issue on a number of occasions in the Committee for Education, including the impact on schools of the planned phasing out of funding.

Budget cuts and redundancies that have been carried out in schools to ensure balanced budgets have worked contrary to the delivery of the entitlement framework. It is one thing to look at the balance sheets and financial numbers and entirely another to think of the effect that those decisions can have on children in the classroom. I am aware that, when schools experience financial difficulties, balancing budgets takes precedence over delivery of the framework. Principals have taken and, indeed, been forced into making those difficult decisions. Staff have been made redundant, a move which, in some schools, has led to fewer subjects being delivered. Again, that is contrary to the spirit of the framework. Those decisions have impacted directly on the educational experience of all their pupils.

A special school in my constituency has fostered a fantastic relationship with the local campus of the FE college. Through the area learning community, it has been able to engage in excellent best practice collaboration, something that Northern Ireland's participation in the progress in international reading literacy study shows is rare, as only over one fifth of teachers say that they are collaborative with their colleagues.

Those relationships that have been built up between schools have been put in jeopardy because of the planned phasing out of funding. As we are in the final quarter of the academic year, and if collaboration is to be encouraged, not just in the short term but in the long term, it must be recognised that that announcement, welcome though it is, comes far too late for many.

Decisions have been taken, best practice has been put in jeopardy, and the educational experience of pupils has been damaged as a result of planning to cope with the phasing out of the entitlement framework funding. I have said in the House previously that a behind-the-sofa approach to funding the education of our children is a far cry from a strategic approach. Inevitably, costs will be associated if principals wish to reverse decisions that were taken prior to last Thursday's announcement of additional funding.

Mr Buchanan: I support the motion. I commend the Chair of the Education Committee and my party colleagues on it for tabling the motion and having it scheduled for debate today.

The importance of funding the entitlement framework for a further two years, as recommended in the independent review of the common funding scheme, should not be underestimated, given the immense benefit that it provides for those in the 14- to 19-year-old bracket. As has been mentioned, since the indication of the tabling of the motion, the Minister gave an indication at the weekend of his intention to extend the funding for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years. That action taken by the Minister certainly shows the effectiveness of the Committee Chair and DUP members in their scrutiny role of his actions and on influencing his decision-making.

However, the Minister must go that step further and work more closely with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a long-term coherent strategy for our 14- to 19-year-old pupils. As Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I know that the Department for Employment and Learning is committed to developing a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce that will contribute to social inclusion and economic success. The crucial elements in achieving such a workforce is a coherent strategy that will deliver effective education and training for the 14- to 19-year-old age group by giving them their opportunity to engage in learning and enabling them to participate in and progress to further and higher education or achieve skilled employment.

Of course, there is a growing concern across all our colleges that the post-primary sector is withdrawing from existing partnerships, despite recognition of the exceptional quality and importance of the vocational programmes that are offered by the further education sector, on the grounds that college collaboration is no longer affordable due to the lack of clarity of future long-term funding or a strategy of the entitlement framework. Indeed, Colleges Northern Ireland has expressed its concern about that matter.

For the future benefit of our 14- to 19-year-olds, it is essential that the excellent partnerships that have been developed with schools and colleges in recent years continue. Given the substantial investment that colleges have made in staff and facilities during the period of collaboration, maintaining progress in that area, although a priority for the Minister for Employment and Learning and DEL, should equally be a priority for the Education Minister and his Department.

Although the entitlement framework as originally envisaged by DEL and DE was to contribute to the wider work of improving educational outcomes for all students and addressing the learning barriers that have seen far too many of our young people not achieving their full potential, DEL's concern is that the current trend of delivery will not deliver those potential benefits, with the result that our young people will continue to lose out and leave school with little or no qualifications, with the most vulnerable falling into the NEET category. That is why it is so important for the Education Minister to work closely with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a coherent strategy that will not only meet the need but deliver for that sector of society.

Under the strategic direction that was set for the future education sector by DEL, the aim of colleges in Northern Ireland is to be at the heart of lifelong learning; to strengthen economic and workforce development; to enhance social cohesion; and to advance individuals' skills and learning. Indeed, our colleges are now seen as a key agent for strengthening economic development. They have a crucial role to play in supporting business and innovation.

Key factors in the provision of education and training for our young people are to help them to identify their future aspirations; to agree programmes of learning that will meet their needs and are relevant to the workplace; to improve individual skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT; to improve employability skills; and to enable progression to higher levels of study.

Although DEL has been endeavouring to bridge the gap through its essential skills qualifications, which, over the past 10 years, have delivered excellent results, there is a need to deliver the essential skills —

5.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Buchanan: — courses to our year 11 pupils. However, the present arrangements in the Department do not allow for that, which I believe is a missed opportunity. Therefore, I say to the Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Buchanan: — that he should acknowledge that there is a problem, accept that there is an opportunity that can be addressed —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Buchanan: — act accordingly, do not bury your head in the sand —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Buchanan: — but endeavour to work closely with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward a strategy —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Buchanan: — that will deliver for the 14 to 19 age group. Sorry, Deputy Speaker.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I assure the Member who spoke previously that I am not burying my head in the sand on any of these issues.

Can we just put into context why I made my announcement when I did? There are no suspicious minds involved in this statement or even in the previous three. Over the last period, the DUP has quite rightly tabled motions that were relevant at the time of tabling. I am working on them, you are working on them and other Members are working on them, and it should not come as a surprise that our work comes to fruition at the same time.

Last year, the Executive made an intervention by making a significant amount of money available to education. That was distributed through the aggregated schools budget. Following that, schools quite rightly lobbied me for entitlement framework moneys. They said that, although they welcomed the funding that came from the Executive, there was still a hole in the budget for the entitlement framework. At that stage, I promised them that I would examine the situation further to see what I could do.

A number of events happened after that. At the Executive meeting that followed what were around 500 job losses at FG Wilson in the autumn of last year, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister called all the Ministers together and set us the task of reviewing our budgets to see how we could create and sustain employment. Ever since, I have been reviewing my budget, and I have paid particular attention to two areas: current expenditure and how it was being spent; and how we could sustain employment through my budget.

We had set significant proportions of funds aside for redundancies in specific areas, and Members will be aware that, over the past two years, around 1,200 teaching posts and a significant number of non-teaching posts have been made redundant. Thankfully, the Executive's intervention has doubtless saved hundreds of jobs, and the money that I set aside for redundancies was not needed in full.

So, what were the issues in front of me? Clearly, one was the entitlement framework. I received a letter through official processes about four weeks ago that set out the entitlement framework funding for schools for the next two years. I told officials not to post that letter but to hold on to it until we had completed our work in reviewing the budget. Bob Salisbury's report was published, and one of its recommendations was that the entitlement framework should clearly continue to be funded.

Is the entitlement framework funded sufficiently? No, it is not. Our entire school budget is not funded efficiently, despite the Executive's valiant work to secure more money for education. I have never stood in the Chamber and said that the Department of Education is funded adequately; we have limited resources, and we have to use them as best we can. So, I endeavoured to keep the £3 million this year to bring the entitlement framework moneys up to £9-odd million.

Looking to next year, I decided that the best that we could do was to make £6·4 million available and to taper off the entitlement framework intervention after that, as was planned originally. I simply do not know what will happen beyond that or whether we will be able to afford to continue to fund the entitlement framework separately. We will have to look at area planning, how the entitlement framework is being rolled out and at the co-operation between schools etc to decide whether entitlement framework funding can be made or will be available beyond that date.

I assure Members that I am not following DUP policy. I think that the DUP might be edging into my policy areas. However, I am sure that all Members will agree that it is doubtful whether schools care whose policy it is as long as they get their money. That is the important thing: the money has been delivered to them. I accept that the money was late in the day and that some schools may have already planned their curriculum offer, but circumstances beyond our control led us to where we are. However, the money has now been issued.

In proposing the motion, Miss McIlveen asked a significant number of questions. I will cover some of them now and the rest as I move on. You asked whether the entitlement

framework funding is enough: it is not. I accept that. I have endeavoured to make available what we have. I welcome the fact that Members now acknowledge that, contrary to rumours elsewhere, I have a savings delivery plan, and it is accessible and viewable. I will say of that plan that I am reviewing my budget in the context of the FG Wilson meeting.

We have been tasked with examining our budgets and how we create and sustain employment. I will make an announcement to the Assembly in the coming weeks — next week if I can — outlining what changes I have been able to make to sustain and create employment in the Department of Education and to enable us to play our part in building the economy through interventions, which will see roles for construction, and so forth. I will ensure that Members are informed of that in full and, in tandem with that, that the Education Committee is fully briefed on any changes to the savings delivery plan that roll out from that work.

Is the DEL and DE working group still meeting? Miss McIlveen referred to my predecessor's commitment to that working group. It is still meeting. Its members have not reached agreement on a strategy, but that does not mean that we are in disagreement. A lot of work has progressed since the letter that you referenced, the date of which you said was, if I am correct, 2009. A lot of work has progressed since 2009. The area learning communities are delivering a strategy at a local level that is based on the Department of Education's policies, and they are working in conjunction with their local higher education providers.

A lot of good work is going on locally, although I remind Members that the sustainable schools policy states that 80% of the entitlement framework should be delivered in the parent school. That is for sustainability reasons and to ease pressure on pupils, in order to ensure that they have a school base. However, great co-operation is going on between schools and DEL at that level through further and higher education groups.

I regularly meet the Minister for Employment and Learning to discuss the way forward in achieving better co-operation between the Department of Education and DEL. Those meetings are also bearing fruit. Indeed, the recent announcement around the EMA rolled out, in part, from our engagements around what is required for our young people's future educational well-being. Therefore, if Members require a written document stating what DE and DEL do together and how we are providing for 14- to 19-year-olds, yes, that can be provided. However, will extra resources come of that? At this moment, no. Extra resources will not come of that, because I do not think that either DEL or DE is in the position to put in extra resources. I see the entitlement framework funding that we have announced as being part of the strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds. I see our work around the EMA as part of it, and we have funded that largely from our own budgets and from savings from the EMA, and so on.

Work towards greater co-operation on a strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds is ongoing, but the outworkings of the strategy and of what is happening is largely, certainly in the Department of Education, the entitlement framework. Members have asked whether we need such a broad range of subjects and for schools to be under pressure to deliver those subjects. The answer to that is yes.

We need our students to be equipped — academically, vocationally and otherwise — with a broad range of skills so that they become better rounded, more tolerant and valued individuals, with more self-belief and able to be more valuable to society. They must be able to react to changes in the economy and workforce and become more independent and resourceful learners. The entitlement framework is equipping all our young people to do that, and it assists the development strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds.

I will cover a few other comments from Members. Mr Kinahan mentioned the cost of area learning communities. I now have a copy of the answer that he received, and, yes, one reading of it would have the cost as being £10·5 million, as the Member stated. However, the costings that he has in front of him are for the courses that are delivered in those individual schools. The actual cost per school of area learning communities is £3,000. When you take into account the additional funding for special educational needs schools, and so forth, the cost of area learning communities is around £600,000 per annum.

I think the area learning communities are very beneficial to our society. We hear much about sharing in education, and there has been a great deal of sharing, of both resources and knowledge, through the area learning communities. They have been a great benefit to our education system. I may have mentioned this to Members before: I visited Scotland late last year. The area learning communities there consist of preschools, primary schools and post-primary schools, all working together and sharing knowledge and lessons together. I would like to see us head in that direction and ensure that all of our schools work together and understand each other's roles in the education system.

As regards other Members' comments, give me one moment to consult my notes. Michaela asked how many schools are involved in area learning communities. All post-primary schools should be involved in area learning communities. Some area learning communities operate better than others. There are fine examples out there of area learning communities that are delivering great work. Some area learning communities are not as proactive as I would like to see them, and some individual members of area learning communities are not as proactive as I would like to see them.

Last year I announced that there was funding for area learning communities, because their funding was also coming to an end. I set aside £0·5 million per annum for area learning communities to bid to for courses that were relevant to the curriculum in terms of numeracy and literacy, etc. So there is funding available for them, and I encourage schools to play an active role in them.

Mrs Hale and Mr Hazzard both referred to the broader outcomes of the common funding formula review, the concerns of some about the common funding formula review and the advantages that Mr Hazzard sees in the common funding formula review. The Department has not come to a final conclusion on the common funding review. Any conclusion that we come to will have to go out to public consultation and views will need to be heard from members of the public, and, indeed, the schools.

There were concerns raised in that context by Miss McIlveen in relation to how the outworkings of the common

funding formula and the entitlement framework will affect rural schools. Rural schools are currently operating the entitlement framework. The common funding formula has specific comments about small schools, etc, but it also states that, if we were to take action in relation to small schools funding, we should bring forward a small schools policy.

That small schools policy, by its very nature, would have to be rural proofed. It would also have to be proofed — I am not sure how we can do this — so as to protect small rural or isolated communities. There are communities out there that are small in number compared to the other communities surrounding them, but they have a stakehold in the community, and rightly so, and their school is part of that stakehold, so we would have to proof it in that way as well. I am not sure how we would do that, but we certainly have to be imaginative and inventive in any small schools policy.

I think I have covered the broad range of issues raised by Members during the debate. As I said, I doubt if schools really care why the funding was brought forward as long as it was brought forward and is put in place. I acknowledge the fact that there is not enough funding in education. There is not enough funding in the entitlement framework either, and I endeavour to work with my Executive colleagues to see if we can secure further funding for education. I will report to Members and to the Education Committee the proposed changes I am going to bring forward in the savings delivery plan as a result of our task to see how we can create and secure employment by using our budgets in a different or more imaginative way. I will report that matter back to Members. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Storey: I thank all those Members who have taken part in the debate, and my colleague Michelle, who proposed the motion. As always, she gives the detail and leaves me to gather up all of the bits and pieces that come as a result of what is said. I do not think that we should dismiss the fact that this is an important day in the House in regard to education, not solely because we are debating this issue, which is very important, but because it is also the day that the Minister has welcomed to Northern Ireland the representatives of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to look at our education system.

We should remind ourselves that that organisation's title is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

5.15 pm

Clearly, it is an organisation that places an emphasis on having coherent, economic, educational co-operation across our education system. I would like the Minister to confirm whether the Committee for Education, as the Committee with the statutory responsibility and as a key player in our education system, will have the opportunity to meet the members of that organisation. I am sure that they want clarity and answers from the Minister, as do we in this House, and an end to the mixed messages, because that is all that we have been getting since 2009.

Let us rehearse where those mixed messages come from. My colleague mentioned a letter from the former Minister Caitríona Ruane to me in 2009, which read:

> *"I wish to assure you of my commitment to work closely with Sir Reg to further develop a 14-19 strategy in the best interests of our young people."*

Then we come to Sir Reg himself. It was interesting that Mr Kinahan mentioned larger schools. I would caution Members about larger schools; we need to be very careful about that issue. What did Sir Reg say in 2009, when he was the Minister for Employment and Learning? I am not sure whether he was still the leader of his party or who the leader was at that stage. I am still not sure who the leader of that party is at the moment. He said:

> *"Building on the good progress made to date, a joint 14-19 strategy will be available shortly for consideration."*

Where is the strategy? Where is the policy? It is not about just getting a piece of paper. It is about getting a policy because, in the absence of a policy that is clearly set down, a vacuum is created and everyone continues to do what they have always done. If you continue to do what you have always done, you will continue to get what you have always got. That is why, again and again, we go around the issues of underachievement and of not giving our young people the best possible opportunities.

Then, of course, there is the Department's website, which I visit every day religiously to see what it is up to and to keep an eye on what it is saying. It says that it has a 14-19 policy, that it is continuing to work with DEL and that it is:

> *"working conjointly to bring forward a co-ordinated programme of provision for 14-19 year olds."*

There is still nothing of substance. It is unfortunate that I am speaking after the Minister, but I hope that he will respond to the point that I want to make. Whatever happened to the document entitled 'Together Towards Entitlement'? That document reviewed the entitlement framework, looked at everything, told us that there were fewer than 10 pupils in some classes and told us the challenges and the issues. Recommendation 1 of that document states:

> *"DE, in collaboration with DEL, should give priority to promoting a wider understanding of the rationale for and implications of the Entitlement Framework and its place within the overall 14-19 DE and DEL policy context to ensure high quality outcomes for this age group."*

Mr O'Dowd: If the Member so wishes, I am happy to respond to that point.

Mr Storey: Yes.

Mr O'Dowd: 'Together Towards Entitlement' has happened. We are in the entitlement framework era. The Member will recall that, in September 2011, I announced that the entitlement framework would become a legislative requirement from September 2013 onwards in a phased introduction. I have reminded the Member that the working group continues to meet. DE and DEL are engaged in proactive work. The 14-19 strategy is being delivered to the area learning communities on the ground, where it should be.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for that clarification. The Committee for Education will be interested to get an

update from the working group to see exactly the ongoing work that it has done.

Let me come to the current Minister for Employment and Learning, Mr Farry. In the House a couple of weeks ago, referring to this motion, he said:

> *"I am also aware that the Member has a motion down for debate in the very near future. My officials and I continue to engage with the Department of Education around those issues, and I know that the Minister of Education is keen to ensure that, collectively, we deliver the best for the young people of Northern Ireland." — [Official Report, This Bound Volume, p124, col 2].*

There is a clear admission that we need to do something. However, as the Minister mentioned, we then come to look at how it is put into practice. Today, members of the OECD arrived at the Building. We also had an Invest NI presentation upstairs on the whole issue of what is available to companies by way of loans and financial help. In that presentation, the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland stated very clearly that there is good working collaboration between DEL and DETI. I appreciate my colleague the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning staying for this debate and being with us to give us support. The sad reality is that it seemed as though DE was missing.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The issue is having a clear, coherent policy that runs through our system to give our young people the best possible opportunities. Why do I say that? As the Minister mentioned, let us see how it works out in practice. The third related link in the chain of what happened in the House today is the Minister's statement on area planning and the future of area planning. What is happening with area planning? We have the Minister's policy and the entitlement framework. We have area learning communities. We have schools accessing the services of further and higher education colleges. We have the absence of a 14-19 policy, albeit with the Minister agreeing that he may give us a paper on that in the future.

I challenge the Minister or any Member of the House to read any one of the area plans that were put in the public domain today and find reference to further and higher education colleges. It is nearly impossible. It does not exist. We have all this talk and rhetoric about practical working on the ground with post-primary schools and further and higher education colleges. However, when it comes to the future planning of our estate, DEL disappears. I think it should disappear. I think DE should disappear, too. We should have one Department for children and young people that looks at all these issues in a far more coherent way.

What is happening? DEL officials stay inside their legislative rights and say, "Let us not cross the line." DE officials stay inside their legislative rights and say, "Let us not cross the line." The two Ministers talk and have all sorts of discussions and conversations. However, does it work practically on the ground? That is where we have a problem.

Let me come to another issue. Where did the 24 and 27 courses come from? The Minister has not clarified that for us. His Department changed the rules a few months ago. He told schools that, because of issues, it is 18 and 24, rather than 24 and 27. It was a movable feast a few months ago. Who told us that the magic numbers were 24 and 27? That is the problem that I have with the straitjackets that the Departments want to put schools into. Is it not better to allow a school, which knows its pupils best, to determine what is best for those pupils and ensure that they have the adequate provision?

The cynic in me will always say that part of the entitlement framework rationale was to try to turn some of our academic schools into vocational schools and to dilute what goes on in our grammar schools. As a result, we now have not only mixed messages but a mixed economy. We have post-primary schools giving courses that they never provided previously. We have further and higher education colleges providing courses that they never provided previously —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Storey: We have other post-primary schools looking at provision that they never had.

The final point that I want to make is around the savings delivery plan. We will wait with interest to see what —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Storey: — the Minister's savings delivery plan has in it. I am not convinced that he has come up to the mark on it. Money has gone somewhere. I want to know exactly where it has gone, and I assure you that we will continue —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone. Order.

Mr Storey: — to look until we find it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly, in light of recommendation 9 of the review of the common funding scheme and the concerns being expressed by schools and further education colleges, calls on the Minister of Education to extend the funding earmarked for the entitlement framework to the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years; and further calls on the Minister of Education to work with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a common funding approach for all pupils and students within a coherent strategy for 14- to 19-year-olds.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]

Adjournment

John Lewis Retail Development, Sprucefield

Mr Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Mr Givan: I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the development opportunities at Sprucefield and, in particular, the Westfield planning application that included the John Lewis store as the key, anchor tenant. That opportunity has been well documented and would have brought £150 million of investment to Northern Ireland. It would have created around 600 jobs in the construction phase and up to 1,500 retail jobs in Northern Ireland at a time when they are desperately needed. Furthermore, it is important for Members to note that John Lewis would have been opening a distribution centre in Northern Ireland had the application been put through. So it is not just about the retail opportunity; the distribution centre and the jobs and investment that come with it would have been part of the development located in Northern Ireland.

Members will be familiar with the long history of John Lewis's engagement with Northern Ireland, which stretches back almost nine years. Let me go through, for the record, how it all started. In June 2004, plans were announced for the first John Lewis store in Northern Ireland to be built at Sprucefield, Lisburn. In November 2004, Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce lodged a formal objection to the planning application. In June 2005, direct rule Minister, Lord Rooker, gave the green light for the John Lewis store and 29 outlets in conjunction with it. In May 2006, Belfast High Court upheld a legal challenge from traders from Belfast and Lisburn, which effectively quashed the planning permission. In March 2007, the Government gave the go-ahead once again. In August 2008, the developer submitted new plans, reducing the number of retail outlets from 29 to 19, and vowed that, as Sprucefield was the only option, ultimately, the development would end up south of the border if the plan was refused. In February 2009, the Environment Minister, Sammy Wilson, announced a public inquiry into the application. In November 2009, Sprucefield Centre Limited applied to the Department of the Environment (DOE) for planning permission for retail, restaurant and associated infrastructural development, and the Department designated it as a major planning application — an article 31 planning application — and requested that the commission hold a public inquiry. In June 2010, the public inquiry was adjourned on its first day because of a new legal challenge by rival traders, who alleged that the DOE failed to advertise the scheme properly. In 2012, a mid-inquiry meeting was held by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to ensure no further delays in the decision.

That is where the process has got to since 2004. It is laughable that we are talking about something that started in 2004. Throughout the process, there has been frustration. There has been legal challenge from Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce and commercial enterprises. I do not blame commercial interests for wanting to challenge this legally. They have the right to do so. I do not object to that, but I object to the courts facilitating a clear conflict of interest — a clear commercial interest — over a planning application. In other places, there is provision for that to be ruled out, and that should be established in Northern Ireland so that the courts do not have to constantly frustrate planning applications because people who have a clear vested commercial interest are trying to block them. Indeed, some of the same organisations then push the boundaries to get planning permission for themselves, but it is all right for them — once they get planning permission, they will do all that they can to stop anybody else getting it.

Then, of course, in January this year, the Minister announced a new area plan, limiting development at Sprucefield to bulky goods only. The nail in the coffin was administered, and John Lewis announced that it was withdrawing its application, but awaits the Executive's consideration of the attempted change in planning policy by Alex Attwood.

I think that it has been helpful for Members to get clear in their mind the very long process that John Lewis and those behind the Sprucefield development have been trying to follow.

We then had an attempt to change planning policy through the Belfast metropolitan area plan (BMAP). It is interesting that the Minister is attempting to go against an independent Planning Appeals Commission. He is interfering with the work of that body, which, for proper reasons, was set up as an independent organisation, but this Minister has decided that he can overrule the independent Planning Appeals Commission.

The Planning Appeals Commission looked extensively at what was recommended for bulky goods provision. We can go through a number of areas in which, in dealing with issues of concern, the PAC recommended that the bulky goods restriction should not be imposed. There are a number of key quotes from the Planning Appeals Commission's report. Paragraph 6.4.8, in reference to the commission's report on the original extension to Marks and Spencer, states:

"The appointed Commissioner in his report expressed the view that the provision of more retail warehouses at Sprucefield would not assist in achieving a regional trade draw."

It continues:

"It is difficult to see how more of this type of retailing will enhance Sprucefield as a regional centre."

Paragraph 6.4.6 states:

"The bulky goods restriction relates to a fundamental characteristic of the centre to which there is no reference in either PPS5 or draft PPS 5. Such a restriction on the type of retailing to be permitted in one of the three RSCs is clearly a regional matter and should have been made explicit in regional policy (i.e. draft PPS 5). In the absence of any such reference in regional policy, the restrictions now proposed through BMAP would have the effect of fundamentally changing the nature of the designation and are not

appropriate for introduction through the development plan process."

That is the recommendation of the independent Planning Appeals Commission, yet this Minister believes that he can supersede all that, go against those independent members and try to retain the bulky goods restriction.

The PAC report states:

"The bulky goods restriction relates to a fundamental characteristic of the centre to which there is no reference in either PPS5 or draft PPS 5. Such a restriction on the type of retailing to be permitted in one of the three RSCs".

Belfast, Londonderry and Sprucefield are the three regionally significant retail centres that have been designated. The Minister is seeking by stealth to take away Sprucefield's regional designation. It is important that we point out that fewer restrictions rather than more are required. The PAC has said that that is required for Sprucefield to achieve what it wants.

Hopefully, the Minister can explain his position to the House today. I trust that the Executive will now be able to deal with the issue, but when the controversy around the statement of intention kicked off, the Minister said:

"I am not attempting to prejudice the outcome of the Public Inquiry".

That is a laudable platitude from the Minister that he does not want to prejudice the outcome of the public inquiry. He then goes on to say:

"I am strongly committed to putting Belfast first in these difficult times."

So he does not want to prejudice the public inquiry into the application from John Lewis for a development at Sprucefield/Lisburn, yet in the same breath he says that he is:

"strongly committed to putting Belfast first in these difficult times."

If that is not a prejudicial statement, I do not know what is. The Minister has blatantly shown the bias in his position by saying that he wants Belfast to be protected first and foremost. We need to bear in mind that that has implications not just for John Lewis. You can forget about development at Sprucefield; even if John Lewis is not able to come to Sprucefield, there will not be any form of development there. The notion that an IKEA-type retailer is coming to Sprucefield is a nonsense. The retail world and how it operates is changing, and government need to change along with that. Change is being driven by consumers, and we need to harness those changes and not try to restrict the way in which things are developing.

In trying to make those restrictions, it is important that we recognise that the retail world has developed through the internet and that we will not protect Belfast by stifling development across Northern Ireland. We can take away Sprucefield as the one issue, because Members may get fixated on it, but, across Northern Ireland, the Minister is saying, "I am putting Belfast first". It is about online shopping, click and connect, what is referred to as omnishopping, shopping through your laptop, iPad and through texting and about the development of Facebook and Twitter. All those new technological advances are shaping the way that the retail world operates, and if traders anywhere, including in Belfast, do not adapt to all that, they will be in terminal decline. Belfast, as is the case in other town centres, may have been suffering the emptying of some of its units, but not because of John Lewis, which it is not even here. Other factors have been part of all that, and we, as a government, now need to deal with this in the Executive.

Quite rightly, this is of regional significance. The Minister, through BMAP, is trying to circumvent what the regional development strategy (RDS) has stipulated, which is that Sprucefield is a regionally significant centre. He is going against the independent Planning Appeals Commission's idea of how Sprucefield needs to develop by trying to impose that restriction even though it believes, and rightly so, that it should be lifted. He wants to put Belfast first purely from a prejudicial basis. We have heard of political gerrymandering of boundaries; this is the retail gerrymandering of boundaries. Putting Belfast first is gerrymandering the retail boundaries of Northern Ireland and trying to do it through a circuitous route; namely, through the area plan, even though the PAC has said that that is wholly inappropriate. It is regionally significant, and, therefore, it requires the Executive to take the decision. I trust that the Minister will yield to the Executive on this and allow them to take the proper decision. That is where the decision should have been taken rather than through the Minister's approach whereby he has sought to bypass the normal procedures in taking his prejudicial Belfast-first policy forward.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank Paul for securing the debate. It is a vital issue given that we are talking about a massive investment of £150 million. People are talking about, whatever is eventually realised, the potential for 1,500 jobs at a time when the private sector in particular is struggling.

I will talk briefly about the longevity of the issue. I acknowledge that the Minister has at least addressed the issue and come up with a decision, but I wonder what kind of message goes out about this economy when an application can be bobbing about for some 11 years in the system awaiting final decisions. Those decisions should be informed by a much more thoughtful, comprehensive, strategic balance between town centre development and its particular and peculiar needs against out-of-town development, which can bring with it the strength of major companies and a greater range of options for the shopper. I do not argue on behalf of Sinn Féin that there is a clear or simple answer. There is a balance to be found, and, whilst I commend the Minister for addressing the application, he has, in a sense, simply underlined the need to bring forward that agreed policy.

Parties should not squabble over this issue but, in fact, they do, and that is the unfortunate image that is projected by a failure to have an agreed way forward. There will always be local interest, and I would say that there are tensions within parties. People, at a local level, will argue, naturally enough, for the interest of their constituencies because they are responsible to their constituencies. However, clear and coherent statements of policy with the appropriate regulation and guidance means that people have an explanation when they go back into their

constituency with, perhaps, a negative outcome on an issue that they had agreed to support.

However, if we are just bouncing about willy-nilly, or if we are looking simply for the weight of numbers as opposed to the weight of argument, I think that we will not make the correct decision and we will not get it right. Quite often, we will get it spectacularly wrong. I believe that the lobbies that exist all have something legitimate and of interest to say to the Assembly. We have to try to find the balance between what are, clearly, at times, mutually exclusive arguments and trying to decide what is best for the economy. I think that we have not always got that right.

So, I support the Minister, and I encourage him to proceed to develop that type of discussion. As the Minister, he has the power to do that, and I certainly would not support any moves to limit his ministerial powers on the matter. I hope that he will expedite the production of the type of discussion document that will lead to agreed and coherent positions that Members, regardless of whether they get everything that they want, can get behind and support, irrespective of any personal or localised interest. That is because I do not think that that approach will lead us anywhere except into further disputes as we move on.

Mrs Overend: I am pleased to be able to speak on what is an important issue for the Northern Ireland economy. The fact is that the proposal for this retail development would be of huge benefit not only locally to the Sprucefield site and to the Lisburn area but to the whole of our regional economy. The substantial benefits of the department store were outlined recently in a statement by Sprucefield Centre Ltd and John Lewis on 1 February 2013 that said:

> *"The Sprucefield Centre Limited, together with John Lewis, was committed to invest over £150 million into Northern Ireland and create over 1,500 retail jobs."*

As the Member for Lagan Valley said, it would have created 600 jobs in construction. Additionally, John Lewis would have opened a distribution facility in Northern Ireland, resulting in further investment and jobs. That is not an investment that we can afford to lose, and those are jobs that we cannot afford to do without. I think that most Members will agree that our economy is in desperate need of a boost, with unemployment remaining stubbornly high at 7·8%, youth unemployment continuing to rise and a claimant count that is the second highest in the UK. We have potentially passed up on a great opportunity to make a positive contribution to addressing some of those figures and reversing the current trend, which sees us move further away from the rest of the UK in making an economic recovery.

We must ask how this decision was reached. The DUP Member outlined the detail of the process since 2004, and I need not repeat that. The recent decision by John Lewis to withdraw its planning application was taken because of the Environment Minister's position on introducing a new area plan, which will limit further development at Sprucefield to bulky goods such as furniture. I understand that that decision was reached as part of a policy to put "Belfast first" during these "difficult times". I also understand that the Environment Minister has stated that:

> *"This is consistent with the revised Regional Development Strategy 2035 which aims to strengthen Belfast as the ... economic driver and the primary retail location in Northern Ireland."*

Although I may understand the reasons that he has given, I cannot agree with him because of the points that I made.

I understand that an analysis of potential sales for John Lewis, depending on its location, has been undertaken, and the results show that it would expect around 30% less if it were to base itself at a city centre location.

I believe that we need clarity on the process that is involved. As I outlined, Mr Attwood made his decision clear. However, we subsequently had the First Minister claiming that this is a matter for the Executive and not for the Environment Minister. We have been told many times that the changes made at St Andrews prevent Ministers from going on solo runs. How does this impact on the John Lewis decision, and who will make any future decisions on this issue? The consequences of these circumstances have, therefore, also led to a lack of clarity and, most likely, a lowering of public confidence in how the Assembly operates and in the Executive's decision-making processes.

One glimmer of hope is that the Sprucefield Centre Ltd and John Lewis said that they will review their position once the Executive have considered the Belfast metropolitan area plan policy and there is clarity on the role of Sprucefield as a regional shopping centre in Northern Ireland. Therefore, John Lewis has continued interest in opening a new department store at Sprucefield, and I urge the Executive and the Environment Minister to act as soon as possible to ensure that that investment is not lost.

5.45 pm

Mr Dallat: I thank Paul for the opportunity to take part in this debate, and I am sure he wonders what on earth someone from East Derry is doing sticking his nose into Sprucefield. However, the subject has been in my heart for many years. Indeed, one of the first debates in which I took part in the Assembly was on this very subject, probably 12 years ago.

I am interested in this because it is Lisburn today, yet it could be Limavady tomorrow and Coleraine the next day. Others will deal with the specifics, the details and all of that, but I will just do the passionate stuff. I am not sure whether Paul visits our neighbouring island, England, very often. If he does, does he ever get off the M6 or M1 and travel through those lovely towns and see the shape that they are in? There is not a shop left. There is no butcher, no baker, no post office. They are all gone, and where are they? They are in the out-of-town shopping centres. That is where they are, and that is the only evidence that I need. They have been replaced by charity shops, hairdressers, — you name it. In Ireland, we perhaps attach a great deal of importance to the heart of our communities — our towns and villages. We have every right to stand up for them.

Let us look at it this way: if the Minister were to please the people over in Lisburn now, the same would happen in other parts next week or next month. And what would we get? We would get these sprawling, unplanned developments. You build this thing out at Sprucefield, and naturally you will get housing around it. That housing will have no amenities, no bus services, no leisure centres, no anything.

If you do not believe me about England, let us take a wee short trip across the sea to America. A few years ago, I was in Ohio for the St Patrick's Day celebrations. I had a few hours to spare, and I asked to be taken to the nearest town. I was taken to a place called Ashtabula, and I will never forget it. There was not a shop left in it. There was one pub with a few men in it, who wore green hats and were celebrating St Patrick's Day. That was it. Where were the wives? They were away to the shopping mall, but they were going to be away all day, because it was at least 50 miles away.

Anyway, let us get back to Sprucefield. The fear is for Belfast. For years, I watched Belfast be bombed and systematically destroyed. In the past decade or more, I have watched it emerge out of the rubble again, which is fantastic. It is becoming an international place for tourists, and why? It is because it is a good place to come to. However, it is hard work keeping the city centre lively and vibrant, and there is evidence that a lot of that needs to be done. Are we going to do today what the bombers failed to do in the past? Will we do the same to Belfast as has happened to medium-sized and reasonably large towns in England? I do not think so. We could be forgiven for making these mistakes if people had not made them before, but, Paul, they have made them before, and we should not repeat them.

Planning is about creating some kind of balance that allows communities the best opportunity to survive, whether it be Dungannon or Derry, Armagh or Antrim, Lisburn or, indeed, Letterkenny, because towns across the border are affected by these things as well. I understand that officials from both jurisdictions meet to try to keep ahead.

A couple of weeks ago, I was in Glasgow as a member of the Regional Development Committee. I went for a wee potter around the city centre, and what did I find? John Lewis, in the middle of Glasgow, next to the theatre, close to the railway station, next door to the bus station, making a solid contribution to Glasgow, the vibrant city that it is. Now, someone please tell me why John Lewis would want things different in Northern Ireland, because I understand that it is its business policy to locate its stores in town centres. Nobody can tell me that. Maybe before the evening is out, somebody will tell us why we want to destroy Belfast in preference to —

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dallat: The time is up.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Lunn: I am glad that Paul Givan has brought the matter to the House. I listened with great interest to Mr Dallat. You could not fail to have sympathy for town centres in their present plight, but there are other considerations apart from the very slow growth of out-of-town centres. Town centres are going to have to change and, perhaps, become more residential, more niche retail and more leisure orientated, and that is just a fact. It is the only way that they are going to survive. Frankly, I am not sure that turning down the biggest name in British retailing is a price worth paying. It is a superb company that, in terms of profit and operation, makes more money out of 28 stores than House of Fraser makes out of over 100. It treats its employees as though they were directors.

John Lewis and Westfield know what they want and, in this particular location, they do not want a city-centre location. They are not going to go to the Royal Exchange, no matter what pressure the Minister puts on them. It is just not going to happen. They have worked out their sums. Mrs Overend mentioned the figure of 20% to 30% less footfall, less trade and less profit for them in that particular location. It is even worse due to the fact of where the Royal Exchange is.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr Lunn is the second Member to quote this 20% to 30% figure. It is a very interesting piece of work. I presume that there is some documentary evidence of that, and maybe he would be so kind as to place it in the Assembly Library.

Mr Lunn: I do not have documentary evidence, but I am advised that it is in the planning paraphernalia of the past nine years. That is an estimate that John Lewis has made itself.

Can we really afford to lose an investment like this — and job creation like this? The Minister has every right to be concerned about town centres, but I do not believe that he has chosen the best way of addressing that decline, especially in the current economic circumstances. What message will John Lewis and Westfield take to their investment friends across the world after nine years of obstruction and argument, when they are actually doing us the favour of bringing £150 million of investment into Northern Ireland, a place where they do not need to be? They can go elsewhere on the island, or they can just not come to Northern Ireland or Ireland at all. I believe that their total investment in the UK represents about 2% or 3% of their total global portfolio. It is not that big a deal for them.

There is a history to this. Mr Givan has given us the chronology of the past nine very sad years, but, even prior to that, Westfield tried to invest £200 million or thereabouts in Belfast for 10 years, and it was defeated by policy in Belfast as well, being told that Victoria Square could go first — and look what that did to Donegall Place — and then the Royal Exchange and, maybe in 10 years, Castle Court. It made a business decision to walk away, but it has come back. It would like to look at Sprucefield and, frankly, I think that it has been treated abysmally by our planning system and by the organisations that have been ranged against it by the Planning Service and the Department.

Not to be too hard on the Minister and, indeed, one of his predecessors who happens to be here, I would like to acknowledge that they have both tried to streamline the planning process, particularly Minister Poots in his time. I will give Mr Attwood credit for trying to deal more quickly with some of the big applications. Even though it is the wrong decision, I doubt whether this one would have been made so quickly under another Minister. You have made that a priority, and I give you credit for it.

I go back to the fact that this is the biggest name in British retailing. It is not going to come back to us. This bulky goods restriction is, frankly, a bit of a red herring. We all know that that restriction is now out of date. It predates internet shopping.

Mr Givan told us, and everybody knows, that the Planning Appeals Commission rejected that as a reason. How can you have a regional shopping centre so designated 10 or 12 years ago, which will only be able to sell bulky goods? If that is the case, how come Next, Boots, Toys R

Us and Argos — to say nothing of Sainsbury's — have all managed to set up shop in Sprucefield in the meantime, and they are not necessarily selling bulky goods. What is going on?

If the policy should have been bulky goods only, how come it has taken nine years to tell Westfield and John Lewis that? How many millions of pounds have been spent in the course of the planning application only for them to be told something that, apparently, has been policy since 2004? What is the point of designating Sprucefield, with all its advantages in respect of road connections, its closeness to large population centres and a regional shopping centre, if major retailers cannot set up shop there? Mr Givan is absolutely right. It will be the end of any meaningful investment at Sprucefield unless this decision is changed. I appeal to the Minister to rethink this one. I do not think that it is too late, but we will hear what you have to say.

Mr Craig: I agree that it is good that this subject has been brought to the House. Like many others around the Chamber, I am disgusted, outraged and sickened by the length of time that this application process has taken, and, as yet, it is not complete. As we learned earlier, this has all been going on since 2004. What I find remarkable in all of this is that we are talking about not only one of the best known names in the retail business in the whole of the United Kingdom, that is, John Lewis, but one of the few national chains in the United Kingdom that buys into the whole social principle with regard to its workforce. That is why I find it remarkable that the SDLP, of all parties, has attacked it.

The company is wholly owned by those who work in it. I think that is something that the Minister needs to go away and have a good, long, hard think about. It is not one of those capitalist companies that drains the resources out of the system and passes them on to billionaires who we all rarely get to see or know about. It is a company that shares its profit among its workforce and is wholly owned by its workforce. I thought that that party over there would have been wholly behind that and would have totally supported it coming in to Northern Ireland and, for that matter, Ireland as a whole. Others have already asked what the issue was. Why could it not go to Belfast or, for that matter, to the centre of Lisburn? All those questions were asked at the time.

In 2006 and 2007, I and some of my colleagues, such as the Minister of Health, were privileged to have sat in negotiations with John Lewis, which were carried out with the local authority at the time. As mayor at that time, I took part in those negotiations, and what I found fascinating about the company was not only its social principles and how well it looked after its workforce but the whole concept of what it was bringing, not specifically to Sprucefield or Lisburn but to Northern Ireland as a whole. At that time, it was said that it would bring 1,200 jobs. Some 800 of those jobs were to be directly associated with the shop, and 400 were to be part of an all-Ireland distribution network. If those 400 jobs do not come to Sprucefield, they will certainly go somewhere else. We can be absolutely certain of that.

6.00 pm

The other thing that I found extremely alarming when the Minister made his statement was that the company, which has a social conscience, had clearly agreed that a quarter of its workforce at Sprucefield would be targeted for areas of high unemployment. In fact, part of the agreement was that it would target unemployment in areas such as West Belfast, which the Minister allegedly represents. I say "allegedly" because 25% of that workforce would have been 300 jobs, targeted for areas like West Belfast. I would not pat myself on the back if I were the Minister, allegedly representing West Belfast and taking 300 jobs away from my own area. I would hang my head in shame, quite frankly.

What was the impact on all of us going to be? A major shopping chain coming not just to Sprucefield but to Northern Ireland plc, bringing with it not only the prestige that it wanted but an all-Ireland draw. That is why it could not go in the middle of Belfast. The company clearly works out its plans so that there is a minimum population of 2,500,000 to draw from.

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

Mr Craig: That cannot be done in Belfast, but we will all be the losers as a result of this, including West Belfast, which the Minister allegedly represents.

Mr Poots: As you go through life, you very often find that the desirable can be unobtainable and the obtainable is sometimes undesirable. The desirable for Minister Attwood is that John Lewis would come to Northern Ireland and locate in Belfast city centre. For me, the desirable is that John Lewis would locate in Lisburn city centre. John Lewis did its own estimates of what it could achieve in sales at the Sprucefield site. It could achieve 60% of those sales in Lisburn city centre, and 80% in Belfast city centre. Therefore, the desirable, from the Minister's point of view, and, indeed, from my point of view, is unobtainable.

The question is whether the obtainable is desirable, namely John Lewis coming to Northern Ireland and settling at Sprucefield. The contention of the Minister should be — it certainly is the opinion of the majority of MLAs — that it is desirable for a number of reasons, without going into great depth on areas already covered by Members. A considerable number of jobs come with the store, and that will almost inevitably lead to some dislocation because every time a new spend enters the market, someone else loses out. However, many people travel outside Northern Ireland to get to certain stores — previously IKEA but still the likes of John Lewis, Harvey Nichols and Brown Thomas. People will travel outside Northern Ireland to go to such stores. We now have IKEA, which took another facility out of the market that encouraged people to travel outside Northern Ireland and take their money to mostly mainland Britain, but elsewhere. That element certainly ticks the box of being desirable.

The project would also encourage considerably more cross-border trade and bring fresh money into Northern Ireland's pockets, employing people in Northern Ireland. That element is also desirable. In terms of job creation and jobs dislocation, I think there would be a strong evidence base that the scheme would end up delivering considerably more jobs than would be dislocated.

The other element of its desirability, which was touched upon, is the ethical business that John Lewis is. The employees are the shareholders and benefit every year over and above their salary by about £3,000. That is as a result of their shareholding in the company that is John

Lewis. I am not really very socialist but that is a socialist model that works, and the SDLP is decrying it. So I would like the SDLP to buy into that model because it is one that works very well. Not only would we create jobs, we would be better valuing people in what is generally a lower-paid sector. So in seeking to bring John Lewis to Northern Ireland, I am really more of a socialist than the SDLP Minister. People in the sector would receive well-paid jobs and enjoy the work that goes with that.

It was pointed out, rightly, that the development would bring a jobs benefit well beyond Lagan Valley. I know that John Lewis was particularly targeting west Belfast as one area in which it recognised that many unemployed people could be trained up directly to work on the shop floor.

I know that the Minister is not wholly opposed to out-of-town facilities because he has passed applications for a number of such facilities, including some in Londonderry. Certainly, in very strong SDLP constituencies, he does not seem to have such a great problem with this type of proposal. Nonetheless, I hope that there is nothing political about this.

The evidence is there: we can have John Lewis in Northern Ireland or we can have John Lewis in Dublin. What would do the most damage to Belfast: a store in north Dublin attracting thousands of people each week down there, or a store 10 miles from Belfast attracting thousands from the South to Northern Ireland?

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Poots: I am backing Belfast by supporting bringing John Lewis to a location 10 miles from Belfast, as opposed to Dublin.

Mrs D Kelly: I, too, welcome the debate, if only to put the record straight on a number of issues. I thought that it was an interesting ploy of Mr Givan's to detail the chronological history of this application as if somehow to wash the hands of his Ministers. I note with interest that Mr Givan failed to put on record that he was a special adviser to the Environment Minister for some of that period, as well as being a Lisburn City councillor.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I am happy to give way on that.

Mr Givan: Believe me that, if, in that role, I had had the opportunity to bring to bear any influence, I would have sought to do so. I did not have that opportunity. As I pointed out, Minister Wilson referred the application to the Planning Appeals Commission in 2009. That is the only decision that a DUP Minister has ever had to make about John Lewis.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Minister Wilson has questions to answer about his continued failure to agree the sale of a small piece of land at Rushmere, which would, coincidentally, bring almost 1,000 jobs in retail and construction. The DUP has, yet again, given mixed messages. However, it is a day and a time of mixed messages from political unionism.

Members want to talk out of both sides of their mouth on some issues because they are local councillors. I note with interest that all those who have spoken thus far have been councillors, and members of councils that backed the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) town retail planning recommendations, which included saving our town centres and the economic regeneration of our town centres. Perhaps the Minister, in his reply to the debate, will detail for me, if not for some other Members, the impact on my constituency if the application by John Lewis had been given the go-ahead.

May I remind Members that John Lewis, plus the 19 other stores, withdrew the application? That was not the Minister's decision, and it is important to recognise that. There has been a failure by previous Environment Ministers to publish a number of planning policy statements that would have clarified matters much sooner.

Mr Givan pointed out the use of the legal system and judicial reviews. I am sure that he, in his capacity as Chairman of the Justice Committee, might want to question the legal system on that.

In Lurgan, for example, there are seven brownfield sites within the development zone of the town centre. Why are those not being developed? Why are growth and development in those areas not an issue for other parties?

The Minister is on record as saying that the footfall in Craigavon, for example, would be reduced by some 35% if the development at Sprucefield were to go ahead. I am interested to learn how that figure was reached.

How was that assessment made? Where did those figures come from? It is important to put that on record.

Mr Poots said that he was backing Belfast, so it might be useful for the Minister to give us his assessment of the current viability of Belfast city centre. I say that because we all know what is happening on our streets, and we know about the additional amount of revenue, as a consequence of the flag protests, that Belfast City Council and the Executive have had to put towards Belfast at this very difficult time.

It is important to realise other matters. Sites are available not only in Lurgan and Belfast but elsewhere. If John Lewis is so keen and has done such a study of the feasibility of being in Northern Ireland, why were other sites not considered? We all know about mid-Ulster and places such as Portadown, which is referred to as the hub of the North. Why were they not considered to be —

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mrs D Kelly: I will give way in a second. Why were they not considered to be alternative and suitable locations?

Mr Lunn: Westfield and John Lewis chose Sprucefield for geographical reasons and for its closeness to population centres. It is far and away, and obviously, the best site in Northern Ireland. I do not decry Lurgan for one minute, but it is not in the same class.

Mrs D Kelly: I am sure that the people of Lurgan, especially those who vote for the Alliance Party, would be very interested to learn of your judgement of the town of Lurgan. On that point, and in relation to Lisburn, one wonders why there was such opposition to proposals for the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site. It was only about three years ago that there was a preferred bidder for that site, and there was a failure of agreement around the Executive table. Then, of course, there was the economic collapse, and the bidder disappeared into the ether. If

people really are champions of their constituencies, one wonders why they did not ask greater questions of their Executive colleagues when they failed to reach agreement around the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site.

I have every confidence in the Minister being able to defend his decisions on this issue. As a party, we champion workers' rights; the party came from the Labour and trade union movements. That is not an unimportant point to remember, particularly in the year of the centenary of the great lockouts in Belfast and Dublin. The SDLP will continue to support workers, but it is amazing to see the number of champions around the Assembly for one developer.

Mr B McCrea: Lots of things have been said, but not yet by everyone, so I will add a contribution. I am struck by the fact that the time I most recently met Mrs Kelly outside this environment was at Sprucefield. I was looking for some lights. There is something about trying to provide a shopping environment that people want to go to.

These days, economic development seems to be about building clusters — retail outlets, science premises or companies. It is efficient to put everything together. That is one reason why I am surprised that we have not been able to build on what seems to me to be an excellent site in and around Sprucefield, which has a good infrastructure and a number of existing significant retail outlets. It seems to satisfy the demands not only of the local population but of the wider population who shop there.

The challenge to the Minister is this: how do we undertake proper regional planning? It cannot be that we merely start off with a greenfield site from scratch. There are existing assets, be they infrastructure or businesses, all of which should be taken into account.

An investment such as that proposed by John Lewis would bring other benefits. Surely, when we are in a recession — and we are, undoubtedly, in one — what Government should do is try to find every way that they can to encourage investment. Otherwise, they are left to pick up the tab either for social security payments or public works and suchlike.

6.15 pm

I am interested in the Minister's approach to that and a can-do attitude that, where there is potential for investment, asks what we can do to make it more attractive and make it happen sooner rather than later, because there is a knock-on effect to employment, both during construction and thereafter. That is the real issue. Nobody denies that we need to have some form of strategic oversight in planning for Northern Ireland. However, it seems to me that we are not entirely convinced about what it is. Maybe the Minister will deal with that.

An issue that also needs to be addressed is the very first one that I think I dealt with when I came into politics. It was that long ago. It was the John Lewis site. I remember getting a photograph. Mr Speaker, you would be surprised to see that I looked a lot younger and slimmer when that photograph was taken seven or eight years ago, when we were saying that we would be welcoming John Lewis. *[Interruption.]* I hear some unkind people saying that the photograph might be in black and white. It shows that we have taken quite an extraordinary amount of time to reach a decision on that.

I have to say, for what it is worth, that the straw poll would indicate to me that just about every woman in the country comes up and asks, "Where is John Lewis?" Mrs Kelly may not be in that group. However, quite a considerable number of people say that they simply do not understand why something that people want cannot be delivered. Why has it taken so long?

Of course, we know that there were issues in the past. We have had the timeline put out, judicial reviews and other issues, but I have to say that people expect better from our Administration. They want to see the matter resolved. They want to see John Lewis in place. The site in Sprucefield is ideal for it. It seems to suit its business model. It seems to be a good employer. It seems to tick all the boxes. I would like the Minister to tell us, if it is possible, what he will do to encourage investment in and around the centres of excellence, commerce and logistics that we have, because we should surely build on our existing assets.

Mr Attwood: I thank everybody for their contributions. I will deal first of all with the point that has just been made by Mr McCrea and was touched upon earlier by Mr McLaughlin, which is that, contrary to what people might think, I am convinced about what is needed with regard to retail policy. When it comes to shaping future retail policy, we need to shape it differently from the past. To go back to Mr McLaughlin's point: that is why we have recently appointed consultants. To do what? We have appointed them to draft a new planning policy statement 5 (PPS 5), which will acknowledge all the issues that have been raised here with regard to the retail picture and narrative in Northern Ireland and shape the policy that is right for the future. What is the policy that is right for the future? It is to embed deeper in the planning system support for town and city centre retail. When it comes to making decisions that are consistent with the law, current policy, practice and the regional development strategy, I have tried to be very faithful and consistent with all those requirements to show that town centres and city centres need to be protected.

A lot of decisions have been made. Members of the House will be aware that, before Christmas, I said no, no and no to three retail applications for Derry and said yes to only one in order to demonstrate that, consistent with policy, practice and good law, that is the way in which we should go in the future.

Mr McCrea wishes to see how we demonstrate that the planning system and DOE are fit for purpose and are opening the doors for sustainable development — there is a difference. I will not be a Minister who, at all costs, places and times, will approve development. I will not. As legislators, we should not indulge that sort of practice, but sustainable development. How have we done that? We have done that by turning around article 31 applications — two thirds of those that I inherited have now been addressed. We have done that through turning around renewable applications, especially for individual wind turbines. Why? To sustain the farming industry. We have done that by meeting or being close to meeting timelines in respect of all planning applications. Corners have been turned, but reform needs to be deepened and the planning system needs to get itself even fitter for purpose. However, let nobody pretend that the past 18 months do not demonstrate that the planning system is fitter for purpose than it was and that there is more work to be done in that regard.

Mr Poots said —

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will take points in a second.

Mr Poots said that the evidence base will show that considerably more jobs will arise from the Sprucefield development than will be lost elsewhere. He referred to what he called "dislocation". That is not the case. I agree on the great merits and ethics of John Lewis. I hope that the consequence of that is that other parties, when it comes to health service expenditure and welfare expenditure, will show the same commitment to ethics so that people in need are put first and profit is put behind the door, where it should be —

Mr Givan: You did not.

Mr Attwood: I will come to that point.

The evidence base flatly contradicts Mr Poots's contention that there will be considerably more jobs from the John Lewis development.

Remember: the issue with Sprucefield is not John Lewis per se; it is the other 19 stores and seven restaurants, the scale of which is greater than the John Lewis proposal. I regret that we are not going to a planning inquiry. The evidence that I rely on is the evidence of survey, the regional development strategy 2035 and the existing planning policy statement 5. If that is wrong or if I have drawn the wrong conclusions, why did those who support Sprucefield not interrogate my evidence, their evidence and the evidence of the third parties that were involved in the Planning Appeals Commission hearing? Why did they not test that evidence in front of the independent body, which would have given advice to government about the right outcome? That is for them to answer. However, I would like to have the answer, because my evidence led to the compelling conclusion that the advice that I had to give to the public inquiry was that we should protect our city and town centres and that the greater Belfast city and town centres need to be protected, particularly Belfast. What is the evidence —

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will. What is the evidence in that regard?

Whatever the Planning Appeals Commission might have said to the Department about its retail recommendations in 2009, we live in 2013. What is the evidence? You may giggle, Mr Givan, but the evidence comes home to your constituency. It comes home to all the constituencies that are within 60 minutes' driving distance of Sprucefield. What is the evidence? Unlike Britain, which has 11% vacancy of business units, we have 20%. It is 23% in Belfast. Tell the businesses, retailers and workers in Belfast, Lisburn, Craigavon, Newry, Banbridge and Newtownards the full consequences of the Sprucefield proposal —

Mr Givan: Of your decision; of Belfast —

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have debate across the Chamber.

Mr Attwood: What is the evidence on the Sprucefield proposal? It would have a 22·9% impact on footfall being diverted from Lisburn to Sprucefield. It would be over 12% from Belfast and 35% in the constituency of Mrs Kelly in Craigavon —

Mr Givan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will give way in a moment.

Mr Poots argued — this is where I will give way — that the jobs from the Sprucefield proposal would be greater than the loss or dislocation of jobs from other centres. There are up to 100,000 retail jobs in Northern Ireland. Of those jobs, up to 50,000 are in the greater Belfast area. The evidence that I wanted to be interrogated and tested before an independent inquiry at the PAC tells me that the impact would have been over 10% on Belfast, over 20% on Lisburn and over 30% on Craigavon. Given that, can you explain to me how you work out the maths that say that the gain of 1,500 jobs at Sprucefield would not have meant a loss of many, many more jobs in Lisburn, Belfast, Newtownards and the greater Belfast area?

Mr Poots: I thank the Minister for giving way. It is a fairly simple explanation. If people are travelling out of Northern Ireland to spend money and there is the potential to bring people into Northern Ireland to spend money in the retail sector, that would equate to a greater spend in Northern Ireland and would create greater employment. I suspect that Belfast has lost far more as a result of the clothes shops on Boucher Road than it would have lost from John Lewis being at Sprucefield.

Mr Attwood: I trust that that evidence will be lodged in the Assembly Library, as I will lodge my evidence on the retail impact that is proven by surveys, the assessment of turnover and interviews in 22 locations. Those figures direct me to draw the conclusion that I have.

Why did I draw that conclusion? The RDS 2035 states that there should be a "precautionary approach" to out-of-town retail. It also states that Belfast is a "regional economic driver" and that Sprucefield is a regional shopping centre. There is a difference. The Executive endorsed the RDS 2035 in March 2012. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Attwood: Secondly, PPS 5, which is the only live retail policy — I wish that that were different — confirms that there should be a precautionary approach. The retail figures on the losses of shops and their closure also confirm that there should be a precautionary approach. In my view, any other approach would have been hostile to the interests of Belfast, Lisburn, greater Belfast and the North.

This was a moment to draw a line in the sand by giving advice to a planning inquiry about what we thought was the best retail policy. It was not the moment to serve the interests of any one or other retailer but to serve the interests of retail over the next 20, 30 and 40 years.

Adjourned at 6.28 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 4 March 2013

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to today's business, I have two announcements to make. The Speaker has been notified by the nominating officer of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Mike Nesbitt, that Mr Robin Swann has been nominated as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning. The Speaker is satisfied that this correspondence meets the requirements of Standing Orders, and he has asked me to advise the House that Mr Robin Swann has been confirmed as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning with effect from 27 February 2013.

In addition, I wish to inform Members that the Minister of Justice wrote to the Speaker on Thursday 28 February to advise that he would not be in a position to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill tomorrow. The stage will be rescheduled by the Business Committee. Let us move on.

Matter of the Day

Security: Mortar Bomb Find in Londonderry

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Gregory Campbell has been given leave to make a statement on the mortar bombs found in Londonderry that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. All other Members who wish to be called should indicate that by rising in their place and continuing to do so. Each Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. I also remind Members that, as an investigation is ongoing, they should be careful about what they say so that nothing might impact on any case that may come before the courts.

Mr Campbell: Last evening, on the Foyle Road in Londonderry, police intercepted a vehicle and, as the local police commander indicated this morning on various news media, in that vehicle were four mortars, live and ready for operation. We live in the context of dissident republicans having made a number of attempts on the lives of innocent people. Thankfully, only a small number of those attempts — too many — have been successful. Many have been prevented by good police work and community support, and it appears to be the case that last night was a similar event. Last night, however, we were within five or 10 minutes of a major outrage. How major it could have been can be established by recalling that, in 1985, there was a similar mortar bomb attack on Newry police station, and the end result was that nine innocent officers were murdered. Police stations in the Londonderry area — any of the three or four that I can immediately think of — are all in built-up areas. The police have indicated, as we all know, that these mortars are notoriously unreliable, so not only innocent police officers but innocent civilians were being targeted.

We need to send out a message that the Assembly in its totality utterly condemns the actions of those responsible last night, commends and thanks the Police Service and the officers responsible for apprehending the device and calls on the community, on whose information, we hope, last night occurred, to keep giving more information such as this and for the police to keep taking the action that they are taking to prevent the wholesale slaughter that could have occurred last night and, thankfully, by the grace of God, did not.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I join with the comments on the Floor and echo the frustration and anger that was felt by the residents of the Brandywell and Foyle Road areas last night. The vast majority of

people in our city woke up this morning thankful that this incident, through whatever intelligence sources, had been stopped. People who are intent on damaging our city and our people need today to step up to the plate, come to the microphones and explain to the people of our city how those actions will advance any city, any people or any cause or build any city of equals or any Ireland of equals.

I was on the ground last night until late this morning. There was palpable anger and frustration from the residents. That was in stark contrast to the view of the vast majority of people and the mood in the city over the course of the events at the weekend in Ebrington Square. It was clearly viewed as an attack on our city and our people. The human cost of moving some of our most elderly and vulnerable residents from their homes in the late hours of this morning was stark. It is, it needs to be said, in stark contrast to the unity of purpose that does exist, continues to exist today and will continue to exist across all sectors of our city. Those who are intent on taking that away or somehow damaging the spirit or the unity across our city need today to answer to the people of the city what those actions were going to achieve in advancing any people or any community.

Mr Durkan: I join other Members in their calls. Ms McLaughlin spoke of the upheaval for residents. I know that my party colleague Pat Ramsey shares those frustrations. He was on the ground with her last night.

There is huge relief in the city of Derry today that those instruments of death and destruction were intercepted last night. Full credit and praise must go to the police for their brave and ultimately heroic actions. We shudder to think what might have happened otherwise, but I have little doubt that we would have woken up today to news and scenes of carnage. I speak for Derry today when I condemn those who would visit that on our society and when I re-emphasise our determination to drive Derry and Northern Ireland forward and not to allow others to drag it back.

Mr Elliott: I start by thanking the PSNI and the security services for their apprehension of the mortars, which has hopefully stopped the devastation that they had the potential to create in the city of Londonderry. The Ulster Unionist Party recognises and indeed can empathise with the people of the city of Londonderry who were disturbed and suffered as a result of the actions of last night.

I do not know whether these mortars came from the same stock, but, last week, the security services indicated that a mortar found in Belfast had come from old Provisional IRA stock. I challenge people from the Provisional IRA, some of whom may now be in Sinn Féin, to bring forward the information that is required to help the security services to stop such actions as happened last night. They must ensure that they give every bit of information possible. Let us be clear: some of those people know exactly where these munitions and explosives are. They should come forward and say. That is the outworking of the so-called decommissioning process. Where are all the weapons that were decommissioned? I thought that they were all out of circulation, but, obviously, they are not. Shame on those who are carrying out these acts now, and shame on those who carried them out in the past.

Mr Ford: I join the Members who have already spoken in condemning those who would carry out such a deed and in praising the police officers who dealt so resolutely with the threat and the army technical officers who assisted them.

I got a briefing soon after the incident occurred yesterday evening. It was absolutely clear that it was a major threat to life, as has been said, not just to the lives of the police officers for whom it was almost certainly intended but to the lives of civilians in heavily populated areas of Derry city. It is absolutely clear how utterly reckless those who would carry out such deeds are. There is no question of any justification. There is no question of their having any support. It is time that they listened to voices of the people from in and around the Brandywell area whom we heard across the media this morning condemning so eloquently what went on. They made it absolutely clear that those who would carry out such deeds do not speak for them.

Since I became Minister, I have had the chance to visit the city on a number of occasions for positive activities in Ebrington aligned to the City of Culture and other aspects, to speak to police officers at Strand Road or to see some of the other good work, led by the city council, being done on community safety issues. Clearly, there is a positive mood in Derry this year, shown in the way that the people of the city have responded to those who would carry out this kind of threat.

It used to be said that there was, in a sense, a division between those who talked about Londonderry and those who talked about Derry. It seems to me that that is not the case these days. The division is between a tiny minority seeking to drag this society back and the overwhelming majority of people who want us to move forward, recognising all the political difficulties that we have in this place but determined to turn our back on this kind of violence. The positive connections between the Police Service and the citizens on both sides of the river are a key way of demonstrating that. We saw that just a couple of weeks ago when Philippa Reynolds tragically died in a car accident. There was enormous support from right across the city for her PSNI colleagues and what they did. I have no doubt that that enormous support continues.

It is a tragedy that a small number of young people got sucked into behaviour against police officers last night, but it is clear where the city as a whole stands. I trust that the Assembly will be seen to stand resolute and united, as we have done, in support of the peace process and those who uphold that peace.

Mr Eastwood: I echo the words and sentiments of the Members who have spoken already. We are very lucky that we are not talking today about something even more serious.I want to put on record our praise for the PSNI and an Garda Síochána for the efforts that they put in to ensuring that another potential attack on our city and our people was foiled. I offer sympathy to the residents of the Brandywell area who were put out of their homes again last night. The people who purport to carry out these activities on behalf of the Irish people need to hear very clearly that the people of Derry and of Ireland as a whole reject them and view them as enemies of our peace process and our political future. We will not be held back. Positive stories are coming out of our city, and we will not allow those who live in fantasy land to drag us back to the past. Derry is on an upward curve, and we will not be deterred from that. This will be a very good year for our city, no matter what these people try to do. I know that I speak on behalf of all the people of the city when I say that.

12.15 pm

Mr I McCrea: As a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, I condemn those who set out with the sole intention of murdering police officers and other people who live in the area. I commend the police officers who, in their normal day-to-day work and line of duty, were able to catch people who were intent on murder. I say, "Well done" to those officers and "Keep up the good work".

This is a better day than it could have been. My colleague Gregory Campbell referred to the lives that could have been lost. That cannot and should not be lost on the community, especially those who subscribe to and support dissident republican activity. It is important that we, as a community, stand together, condemn those responsible and ensure that the courts and the justice system deal with the people who have been arrested. We leave that in their hands. Again, I commend the police officers, and I hope that more work is done and more information brought to the police to ensure that further arrests are made and further attempts on police lives are stopped.

Mr Allister: I trust that we all welcome the fact that this murderous attempt was thwarted and that we will all show our appreciation and thanks to the intelligence services, which contributed to that thwarting. Sadly, some in the House wish to thwart the work of the intelligence services and to see the efforts to have the National Crime Agency operating in this Province thwarted. Last night was a reminder of why we need such facilities.

Vile, hideous and murderous as last night's attempt was, it was no more vile, hideous or murderous than the Provo attack on Newry police station, which some in the House still will not condemn. Of course, such acts are still happening, because the Provo template is seen to have worked for those who operated it. The current bombers look into this House, with its special provisions that guarantee a place for terrorists in government, and draw hope and succour from the belief that the terrorism that worked for the Provos can also work for them. That is why the attacks continue, and, so long as the House closes its eyes to that reality and continues to sustain a system that rewarded terrorism, no one should be surprised that, sadly but inevitably, we have more terrorism from those who ape what the Provos did and who follow through to the letter the Provo template on all this. This was wrong. It was wrong in the 1970s. It was wrong in the 1980s. It was wrong in the 1990s. It has been wrong in this century. Those who justify what happened in the past continue to feed the mantra that generates today's terrorism. If they want to be taken seriously today, they need forthrightly to condemn and repudiate that which they did in the past, setting the example to today's terrorists. That, sadly, is the reality.

Mr McNarry: Ten minutes from murder is a daunting prospect and another warning that our society remains under constant threat from evil people who clearly do not fit into and have no desire to fit into today's society, which we in this House have helped to create. That is their decision, but, as Gregory Campbell said, there is an onus of responsibility on the House to stand together today in total rejection of this near-miss action, and so we must. It must not just be a token call from the House but be driven home by all Members from every constituency in Northern Ireland. Last night was a timely reminder to all towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland that they must remain vigilant and alert, because their safety is not guaranteed. It can and will be guaranteed only by the tremendous work carried out by the PSNI and others last night in rescuing a situation that was 10 minutes from sheer hell.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Having today had a matter of the day and a question for urgent oral answer rejected on the subject of the perversity of the operation of bail arrangements in the Province, I want to ask why the House is running away from facing up to the consequences of the actions of the courts last Friday, when William Frazer, a man without a record, was refused bail —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — while Sean Hughes —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: — a notorious IRA man, walked free on bail.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Allister: Why is the House running away from debating that matter?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member should take his seat. As all Members are aware, it is the Speaker who determines questions for urgent oral answer and matters of the day. If any Member wishes to have an item of business discussed in the Assembly, that should be taken to the Business Committee, which determines what items come forth. This is clearly not a point of order.

Committee Membership

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item in the Order Paper is a motion on Committee membership. As with similar motions, it will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That Mr Basil McCrea replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; and that Mr Sean Rogers replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Mrs McKevitt.]

Executive Committee Business

Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013: Assembly Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 12 December 2012.*

It might be helpful for Members if I give some background to the tabling of the motion and how the order affects Northern Ireland. In 2011, the UK Government launched a consultation under the title "Empowering and Protecting Consumers", in which they proposed a number of reforms to the current institutional arrangements to ensure that consumer advice, representation and enforcement were delivered effectively and efficiently. This order will implement some of the changes proposed in that consultation. The order is being made under section 5 of the Public Bodies Act 2011, which enables UK Ministers by order to modify the functions of a specified public body and to make consequential and supplementary changes. The primary purpose of the order is to make changes to the Office of Fair Trading's consumer advice function. Currently, the Office of Fair Trading has a power, under section 8 of the Enterprise Act 2002, to operate a consumer advice scheme for the whole of the United Kingdom. The changes that the order will introduce in relation to Great Britain are to transfer this function to Citizens Advice and to Citizens Advice Scotland. In relation to Northern Ireland, the OFT consumer advice function other than for postal services will be abolished. The order will also make minor modifications to a number of enforcement functions of the OFT.

As the power to provide consumer advice is a transferred matter, the consent of the Assembly is required for the order by virtue of section 9(3) of the Public Bodies Act 2011. Although the OFT has had the power to provide for a general consumer advice scheme in Northern Ireland, it has never operated such a scheme here. This is because my Department already had a consumer advice service in operation before the launch of the scheme provided for by the OFT. The service operated by my Department operates under the name of Consumerline and gives advice to consumers on the circumstance of their specific complaint. Consequently, the changes being brought in by this order will have no significant impact for Northern Ireland consumers. As I have already indicated, under the order, the OFT will retain the function for providing for consumer advice in relation to postal services for Northern Ireland. This is because postal services are not a devolved matter. Although the OFT retains the function of providing for the advice scheme for postal services in relation to Northern Ireland, the advice service will actually be delivered by the Citizens Advice service.

The order also makes some minor changes to the enforcement of consumer law. The OFT is designated as

an enforcer in a range of consumer legislation in force across the UK. In some cases, it shares a duty to enforce with other enforcers. The policy intention is that, in the future, local trading standards authorities, including the Trading Standards Service of my Department in Northern Ireland, will take the lead in enforcing consumer protection legislation. This necessitates a change to the legislation specified in the order so that the OFT will no longer have a duty to enforce but, rather, a power. The order also makes an amendment to section 213 of the Enterprise Act 2002 to provide that the enforcers, including my Department, will no longer need to consult the OFT when applying for an enforcement order. Instead, enforcers will simply be required to notify the OFT.

The amendments to be made by the order will ensure that Northern Ireland will continue to benefit from a UK consumer advice scheme for the users of postal services, and they will enable the Trading Standards Service of my Department to take the lead in enforcing a range of consumer protection legislation. At the same time, the OFT expertise in this area will continue to be available in Northern Ireland and in common with the rest of the United Kingdom. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Mr Flanagan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for tabling this Assembly consent motion. I will not keep you too long. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment considered the Assembly consent motion at its meeting on 24 January and was content with the proposals.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment for considering the matter in the manner in which it did and for allowing the motion to come to the Floor of the House today. Again, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 12 December 2012.

12.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Benefits: Advice and Awareness

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes. *[Interruption.]* Order. *[Interruption.]* Clear the Public Gallery.

Mr Durkan: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises the challenges facing the advice sector and the need for individuals to have access to advice and assistance in relation to their welfare rights; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to devise an advice services strategy, to develop an awareness campaign for individuals and to provide adequate funding for independent advice providers.*

I do not think that any Member of the Assembly would not recognise the hugely important role played by the advice sector in society today. Front line advice workers deal on a daily basis with individuals and families, often in distress, always in need of help and guidance. We are talking about older people, younger people and people with disabilities. They need help with a wide range of issues: employment rights; benefit advice; housing-related enquiries; immigration help; increasingly, sadly, emigration help; fuel poverty; health issues; and many, many more. Without accessible front line advice services, many people would not get the support that they need and end up drowning in a sea of debt, poverty and despair. We should not underestimate the lifeline that is provided by advice services, nor can we take it for granted.

I am sure I am not the only Member who has had to contact regional advice providers, such as the Citizens Advice or Advice NI, for help dealing with particularly complex enquiries from constituents. Nor am I alone, I am sure, in working closely with local community-based advice providers and resource centres on a regular basis on individual cases. Those services are important to us as public representatives and are vital to the public that we represent.

Although access to statutory advice services and departmental direct lines is effective in resolving many individual concerns, there is no doubt that the invaluable services provided by the independent advice sector complement statutory services and increase accessibility. The sector is being forced to deal with an unprecedented demand for help. It is being forced to do so within serious budgetary constraints, putting massive pressure on those men and women who work round the clock, often in difficult conditions, with stressed-out clients.

Unemployment is rife and businesses are struggling, as we show few signs of recovery from recession. For every big firm or multinational that has to close, like FG Wilson and HMV, there are dozens and dozens of small businesses giving up the ghost in towns and cities across the North. Currently, around 53% of people over the age of 16 here

are claiming benefits. That is a huge proportion. The redundancies to which I have just referred will lead many newcomers to what is the minefield of the benefits system, after having being employed for years. Those people in particular would be lost without the assistance of welfare rights workers.

The workload for advice groups has been compounded by the huge number of appeals against decisions deriving from the flawed Atos work capability assessment. With the failings of Atos, we have seen an unprecedented number of overturns on appeal. In many cases, if not most, those people, often vulnerable, have decisions overturned in their favour thanks to guidance and representation from advice workers to ensure that they receive their entitlement.

It would be impossible to touch on every aspect of support that is provided by the advice sector, but we cannot ignore the changes that the Department for Social Development (DSD) has made, and is seeking to make, to the welfare system, or how those changes will impact upon individuals and the sector. We have seen the new employment support system implemented and changes to the local housing allowance. Although those changes came with advice provided by the Department, it must be acknowledged that new applications and criteria brought forward by those actions proved complicated and confusing for individuals.

Without the support of the independent advice sector, many existing and new claimants would have ended up lost to the system or witnessing a delay in their payments. The SDLP believes that we must work towards reducing the strain facing the sector, preferably through reducing the number of those who require help but immediately through resourcing the sector adequately to deal with the pressures that it is under. It is our contention that the economic context — budgetary cuts across the board and the pending welfare reform changes — will only add to the pressure. It is vital that we support the advice sector now and through the pending period of transition to ensure that individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable, are able to access free and independent advice to safeguard them against destitution.

We recognise and appreciate the work that DSD has done to date, and continues to do, to assist individuals with their welfare rights. Annually, DSD provides some £4·5 million for a range of advice provision, including regional advice support — there have been some issues there — front line advice support, housing advice and advice supporting benefit uptake. The Department has had success with its benefit uptake programme, as I am sure that the Minister will remind us, and a recent DSD consultation aims to build on that success to target vulnerable groups more successfully.

However, despite that commitment from the Department, there is much more to be done. Our concerns centre on the current demand facing the sector and the inevitability that that demand will grow with the proposed changes to the welfare system. We cannot ignore those changes, and it is unfair to expect claimants and potential claimants to wait in limbo, relying on news reports and Chinese whispers to inform them of the implications of reform. Advice services receive queries daily about the coming reforms, and as yet there are no concrete answers for them to give. Centres need to be resourced to deal with an increased volume of calls and to offer support and guidance to individuals throughout this period of change.

Although I welcome DSD's work, it is important to make the point that the Department itself has acknowledged that, for many, the barrier to benefits is a mistrust of statutory bodies. With the constant media focus on the Tory cuts agenda, individuals are now, more than ever, anxious in that regard. They would much rather get help from a poacher than be struck off by the gamekeeper. It is also worth noting that the new systems are expected to rely more heavily on IT applications and a new IT processing system. DSD must engage with community-based advice providers as well as regional organisations to instruct and assist them through theoretical and functional changes. I fear that an increased role for online benefit applications may present a further barrier to benefit uptake here.

In England, the Cabinet Office, along with the Big Lottery Fund, has created a £65 million advice service transition fund to assist the advice sector to provide support to individuals through these welfare changes. Alongside that fund, the Government have published a review of the not-for-profit social welfare advice sector in England. That demonstrates that not only do the Government have a role to play in supporting the sector but that advice providers will need to show initiative and change the way in which they work. They must increase levels of collaboration to build sustainability and effectiveness.

None of that £65 million fund has been allocated to Northern Ireland, and I want to know where the parity is in that. Scotland has also injected new money — in the region of £6 million — to advice agencies to assist with welfare changes. I appeal to the Minister for Social Development to do likewise, particularly as it has already been accepted that the impact of these changes will be even worse here than in other regions on these islands. The Minister needs to identify adequate financial support, and that support must be available to him to strengthen our advice services. The Minister must also show leadership and encourage the advice sector to form a more effective working relationship with the Department to ensure that the best front line services are available to individuals in need of help.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I want to place on record that the Committee has not formally considered the motion, but I will seek to accurately relay the thoughts of the Committee and the way in which it has dealt with these issues.

The Committee recently concluded its consideration of the Welfare Reform Bill, and one key element of that was people's right to access independent advice. The Committee received presentations on putting such independent advice on a statutory basis, but stopped short of supporting the formal proposition to seek to amend the Bill in that way. I speak for every member of the Committee, all of whom were consistent in the view that people need to have proper access to independent advice on their entitlement to benefit, and so on.

The Committee is unanimous in wanting to ensure that the Department gives adequate resources to the independent advice sector. The Committee members were unanimous in recognising that, on every occasion when awareness

campaigns were organised or launched, there was a take-up of benefit entitlement that people had not properly availed themselves of until that point. Therefore, the Committee agreed unanimously on all the key aspects of today's motion. That will be very welcome to all those who rely on benefits because it is important that they get their entitlements.

The precise methodology of how the Minister, the Department and the advice sector work together to make sure that we maximise the rights of claimants to be able to get their entitlements is a matter for discussion. Clearly, as the proposer of the motion pointed out, the Department already deploys considerable resources to the advice sector, and we need to ensure that those are deployed wisely. People will, undoubtedly, face increased challenges as a result of the welfare reform agenda. It may, therefore, be logical for the Department to put aside increased resources for the independent advice sector. The Committee unanimously endorsed all the concepts of the motion, and that is a very good and welcome development.

To date, the Committee has looked at a range of issues, had a range of engagements and, for example, embraced the work on fuel poverty. Stakeholders highlighted the need to ensure people's ongoing awareness of their entitlements. Many people, including some senior citizens, do not always know their entitlements. People in the childcare sector pointed out that resources are available to many parents who are, as yet, unaware of them. When the Department and the Social Security Agency embarked on awareness campaigns of benefit entitlement, there was not a single occasion when people were not able to draw down extra entitlements as a result.

So it is fair to say that, although the Committee for Social Development has not considered the motion formally, the record will show that members across all its parties will endorse it unanimously.

12.45 pm

Ms P Bradley: I also rise to speak as a member of the Social Development Committee. I welcome the tabling of the motion today. As a caring society, we in Northern Ireland must ensure that those who require access to advice services can do so in a timely manner.

Day and daily, constituents come into my office expressing a high level of fear and trepidation about the incoming welfare reforms. There is also misunderstanding and misinterpretation about the forthcoming legislation and about the impact that it will have on people who currently receive welfare and on people in work who worry about what will happen should they ever need to access the system. I believe that good-quality advice is vital in counteracting that misinformation and possible scaremongering in our communities.

We have seen success in the past year of campaigns that were aimed at raising people's awareness of the importance of ensuring that they receive all the financial help that they are entitled to. That has been especially true in the case of people who are aged over 60. Since 2011, we have seen significant numbers of people taking advantage of the various ways of conducting a benefit check on their household to ensure that they are not missing out.

The question of who is best placed to deliver that advice also needs careful consideration. I worked for Citizens Advice for a number of years, so I believe that, as they are embedded in our communities, the independent providers are a good way of delivering that advice.

The role of statutory agencies also needs to be considered and explored so that the good work that has been happening can be built on. For instance, the role of statutory agencies, such as Land and Property Services (LPS), could directly target people who may not be availing themselves of their full entitlement. People who are identified will receive a personal letter from the Minister encouraging them to make the call. That shows how the statutory agencies working together can have a positive impact. I believe that the statutory and voluntary agencies need to work hand in hand to ensure that we are reaching everyone who needs to be reached in that respect.

Welfare reform is not about punishing the poor or creating division between deserving and undeserving; rather, it is about ensuring that we make better use of our resources to target those who need help the most. It is about making work pay and ending our over-reliance on our benefit system by those who are capable of work.

Advice before the implementation reform and after its introduction is vital to ensure that we achieve our aims. The majority will not scrutinise the reforms as we have done in the Chamber and in Committee. Therefore, we need to ensure that the information that is in the public domain is correct, easy to understand and relevant to each individual circumstance, and that people are aware where they can get that advice.

The Department has already begun that work through media campaigns and work in the voluntary and community sector. Statutory agencies have also played a role, and I believe that they will be vital in reaching the hardest groups in our society to give help and support. I support the motion.

Mr Copeland: I thank Mr Durkan for bringing forward this important issue. The role of the advice sector is discussed occasionally in this Chamber, and it appears that the same issues, such as a lack of resources or even uncertainty about meeting statutory obligations that need to be met, are raised time after time.

In his concluding remarks, the Minister will hopefully be able to clarify his vision for the future of the sector, particularly given the possible turbulent nature of the next few years.

Looking at Advice NI's annual statistics for 2012, it is easy to see why organisations such as that provide such a crucial role. It dealt with just over a quarter of a million enquiries last year. Add to that the endless streams of people who go to other organisations or those who should, but do not, seek support, and, very shortly, a picture emerges through the mist.

The forthcoming Welfare Reform Bill will only put further strain on that already busy sector. It is a piece of legislation that we were told was so important and so urgent when it was eventually introduced in the Assembly in October that we could not afford to delay, even for a number of weeks, without facing huge financial penalties. Yet, it continues to linger, casting a huge cloud of uncertainty. The Minister has stated that decisions have needed to be taken by

so many dates now that, unfortunately, no one really has an idea of where exactly we lie with the timetable. That impacts greatly on those involved in making the preparations for the advice sector.

With the Department having seemingly failed to explain to the wider public what may be coming down the line, that has left the wider sector in the inevitable position of having to prepare for what will be a sudden and substantial upsurge in enquiries. There is no denying that the Department, with the support of the wider advice sector, has begun to work on issues such as benefit uptake. However, it is falling far short of the mark on other issues, such as our continuing and unacceptably high levels of fuel poverty.

On top of the existing challenges, Minister McCausland is presiding over the progress of the Welfare Reform Bill, which includes clauses that his own party colleagues said last week in Westminster, I believe, will hurt those living in poverty and those with disabilities. Although the Minister will no doubt refer with some clarity to the millions of pounds — £3·5 million according to me — that were made available to fund front line advice, less than half of that came from his Department, with the balance being met by councils. He may well then, with equal fervour, state that money is being made available until March 2015 for the Northern Ireland Advice Services Alliance.

All of that is very welcome and noble, but we have all heard it so many times before. However, when one looks back just a few months and sees the levels to which key areas such as the social development housing programme underspent the money that his Department provides for advice provision, that could be viewed as less than significant.

I would like the Minister to detail, even roughly, how the level of money that his Department has spent on public messages warning of the potential introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill, as well as increasing the support available for the advice sector, compares with other departmental campaigns, such as the hugely worthwhile road safety campaign of the Department of the Environment (DOE) or even some public campaigns run by the health service.

Despite a propaganda campaign that the Department apparently tried to start last week, we can not for one moment forget that the Bill will make an already hard life more difficult for potentially tens of thousands of families. Any and all forms of support but especially the provision of quick advice and assistance will be crucial if the Department is to ensure that those families find some way of coping.

It is not an ideal situation. The Department could be accused of underperforming in some aspects, but I am glad that there is at least someone in the independent advice sector —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Copeland: — that is ready to step in and is more than capable of doing so. I support the motion.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the motion and thank the Members for securing the debate. Welfare reform, on top of the ongoing recession and cuts to public services, means that enormous pressure will be placed on our already strained advice sector services in Northern Ireland. I know from those coming into my constituency office that people have an increasing number of questions about the changes to the welfare system. Information on the changes has been drip-fed, so it is difficult for the public to understand what those will mean for them in real terms. People are worried about the changes and afraid of the unknown. Therefore, an awareness campaign to update individuals on what is happening, and when, is vital to allay fears and provide clarification on some untrue rumours out there.

I have also seen increased demand in my office for representation at appeal hearings and tribunals. Given the high number of cases overturned on appeal, we need to ensure that the correct decisions are being made at the outset so as not to waste resources on appeals. With our office cost expenditure being continually reduced over the next number of years, we will inevitably rely further on local advice organisations such as Citizens Advice and the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre in my constituency. Without them, I can only begin to imagine what our caseload would increase to.

As other Members said, and as we heard in the Committee for Social Development, Advice NI has sent some of its advisers to applied suicide intervention skills training. Unfortunately, that is a harsh reality and enables members of staff to be able to recognise those at risk of suicide. I wrote to the Minister, a few weeks ago, to suggest that he look into commissioning additional advice workers, perhaps on a constituency basis. Those advice workers could work across each MLA's constituency office on a rota basis, over the five-year implementation, to provide impartial advice to constituents. Although it would not solve the problem entirely, it could go some way towards alleviating pressure on the advice sector.

In short, it is clear that finances need to be made available in order to provide mass training for those working in the advice sector, so that they will be equipped to deal with the substantial changes under universal credit. It is concerning that there appears to have been a lack of communication between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the advice sector in relation to the huge pressure that the Bill will place on them over the next five to 10 years. Importantly, the advice sector needs not only adequate funding but to know that the funding is long term, so that it is allowed to plan and review the service that it is delivering, without having to worry constantly about where its next money is going to come from.

In closing, Mr Deputy Speaker, I join Members in supporting the motion and in calling for action on an advice services strategy in order to show the sector that we are serious in our support for the vital work that it does — work that often goes unrecognised.

Ms Brown: I rise as a member of the Social Development Committee to speak on the motion. I congratulate the Members in securing the debate, which I am happy to support. At this point, I declare an interest as a member of the management board of the citizens advice bureau in Antrim.

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of times of change for many people within the benefit system. It is, therefore, critical that we, as elected Members, ensure that all our constituents who are affected by the change are given every assistance possible to help manage that

change. Central to supporting the uptake of unclaimed benefits is the provision of advice and information. The Department has a role to play in providing to current or potential claimants information on entitlement, and it provides £4·5 million a year to support voluntary service advice. A further £1·9 million is made available by local councils. I believe that the Department has worked very hard to provide information in that area. I have seen plenty of advertising and information being made available. It is a very positive initiative, which appears to be delivering as intended.

Advice and support is of particular importance at this time, as changes to the welfare system have caused anxiety among vulnerable groups. I know that from my experience in my constituency office, as people worry about their future entitlement and future possible hardships.

In Northern Ireland, we benefit from a wide range of voluntary organisations, which communicate and work with the vulnerable groups that are in receipt of benefits or with those who are seeking assistance from the welfare system. Citizens Advice provides information and guidance on a range of issues, not just benefit uptake. It is in receipt of funding support from government to support the tremendous work that it does in easing people's anxieties and worries amid an economic downturn.

There are, of course, further examples, such as Age NI, which, I know, has been encouraging benefit uptake among the elderly, and I am sure that there are organisations in each of our communities that are doing very similar, worthwhile work. Very recently, I have been working with Employers for Childcare, which has been providing benefit checks and childcare vouchers to my constituents in South Antrim. That work is ongoing.

I am keen to see that those at the centre of change to the welfare system are supported by the Department in a proactive fashion. I know that those currently in receipt of disability living allowance are receiving communication in relation to the introduction of the personal independent payment and that those who were previously on incapacity benefit have received communication in relation to the introduction of employment and support allowance. The Department is, therefore, supporting those directly affected, and the advice sector, in conjunction with the Department's Opening Doors strategy, is onside in supporting those in need of help. I am, therefore, generally supportive of the motion. I thank the Members for tabling it, as it highlights the need to support many thousands of people through a very difficult time of change. I support the motion.

1.00 pm

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, rise to support the motion. As someone who worked as an advice worker in a welfare rights centre for 27 years before I came to the Assembly, I am acutely aware of the necessity for and importance of the advice sector.

The complexity of the current benefit system has meant that more and more people have required advice and assistance to deal with their benefits. Advice workers also have an advocacy role. As MLAs with constituency clinics, we all realise the increase, in particular, in the number of people who have been turned down because of the shambles — I say "shambles" advisedly — of the work capability assessment and what ensued from it and the absolute need for advice and advocacy to be given to the most vulnerable people in our society, who are suffering as a result.

A lot of the time and energy of advice workers and people who work in advice centres is spent seeking funding when it could be much better employed in actually dealing with the purpose for which they are there, which is to give people advice and assistance. Now we have welfare reform coming down the road. Paula Bradley said in her speech that it is not an attack on the poor. Of course it is an attack on the poor. As recently as the weekend, the British Defence Secretary, when looking for more funding for defence, suggested that the welfare budget — no other budget — should be cut, as if there had not been enough cuts. It is said that welfare reform does not target the poor, but those who are most in need. It does target those who are most in need, but it does so by cutting their benefits and ensuring that there will be more poverty and destitution as time goes on.

As regards universal credit, for instance, we have been told that there are a couple of reasons for it. Its underlying principle is that it is better to be in work than on benefits. Nobody argues with that. We have also been told that the reason that welfare reform is being introduced is to simplify the benefit system. Well, I have sat for the past year, approximately, listening to officials trying — I say "trying" — to explain universal credit. If that is not complex, I wish someone would tell me what is. All it does is reinforce, more and more, the need for advice and advocacy services.

The point was made by, I think, both Paula and Pam that advice centres are very rooted in communities, but a lot of them are also cross-community centres and do tremendous cross-community work. In many cases, there is no barrier to people going to different advice centres to get much-needed advice and assistance. The Minister has talked about a strategy for increasing advice and, indeed, benefit take-up. For instance, underclaimed pension credit currently runs at approximately £1·9 million. That needs to be addressed. Over the years, various schemes have been tried through Advice NI and CAB. To a large extent, they have been successful, but they need to be more successful. They need to target more people and ensure that those who are most in need of benefits get them. Historically, people here have a fear of officialdom and the statutory organisations. Again, the point was made that people are much more likely to go to independent advice centres, where they feel that they get a hearing that is beneficial to them.

We have heard much talk about the online take-up of benefits. We have been told by officials that 75% of people here in the North have access to broadband. As one Committee member suggested, the survey was, presumably, done online. Therefore, it actually targeted the 75% of people who have broadband. Many rural areas do not have access to broadband.

The Department is closing three community offices. One is in Crossmaglen, another is in Shantallow in Derry, and the name of the other one escapes me at the moment. Those offices service rural hinterlands and large urban populations, particularly in Derry. There is much need for them. With the closure of those offices, more and more advice and assistance will be needed by more and more people.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Brady: Although I support the motion, I think that the Minister needs to come forward today and give us a sustainable strategy for advice and tell us what advice centres can expect in the future as their workload continues to increase.

Mr Eastwood: Obviously, I support the motion. It is meant not to be political or party political but helpful. I am glad that we have support from around the House. The motion is set in the context of the fact that over 120,000 children in Northern Ireland live in poverty, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found last year. Many of them live in very severe poverty, and there is no sense of that figure getting any better. We also have the oncoming onslaught of welfare reform, which has been mentioned. Anybody who works in the community knows the difficulties that that will create and that it is being driven by Tory ideology to try to attack the poor to prop up everything else. We should not ignore that fact when we are dealing with this issue.

Mrs D Kelly: Does the Member agree that there is something obscene about the Government's proposals to cap benefits but not the bonuses for the bankers who created the financial crisis that we are now in?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Member for her intervention. It is clear, when you look at the policies being implemented by the Tory-Lib Dem Government, that they have no regard for and no real understanding of what the people whom we are talking about today are going through. Their friends are the bankers and the people on huge bonuses. They do not really know anybody who is on the breadline and have never dealt with anybody who is going to an appeal and needs support. They have also never dealt with anybody who has had the benefits to which they were entitled taken away because of Atos. There is a real lack of understanding, and that is the context in which we find ourselves.

We ask, therefore, that as much support as possible be given to mitigate the real dangers of welfare reform and the effect of the all the other economic disadvantages that people face. Everybody in the Chamber knows about the good work being done by organisations on the ground. My office is getting busier and busier as people understand the implications that welfare reform will have for them. People do not really know and have not grasped how difficult this will be. The people on the front line are those from Citizens Advice, Advice NI and the resource centre in Derry and all who work tirelessly to assist those in greatest need. I hope that we do everything that we can to support them.

My colleague Mark Durkan touched on the issue of benefit uptake, and some good work has been done. However, Employers for Childcare recently told the OFMDFM Committee that around 232,000 families were not even aware that they were entitled to childcare benefits. People on the ground need to be aware of that, and we need to support those who are trying to make people aware of it. I want to —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that it is hard to understand why OFMDFM — the Department responsible for childcare — has not enacted an awareness-raising campaign throughout the community about the benefit advice and assistance that is available to parents to assist with childcare costs?

Mr Eastwood: It was shocking to hear that over 230,000 families had not been aware of or had not taken up their entitlements under the childcare provisions in the benefit system. I hope that OFMDFM will now increase awareness and help organisations such as Employers for Childcare to make people aware of the benefits to which they are entitled. We have called for that previously. I support the Member on that point.

I want to mention the Shantallow community benefit office, which Mr Brady referred to. Over time, the people in that benefits office have developed human knowledge and human expertise that is not in any way replaceable by a computer or a telephone conversation. We need to do all we can to support existing work, including the work that is going on in the Department. I know that it is probably too late, but, at this very late stage, I implore the Minister to revisit that decision to try to ensure that the people whom I represent have as much opportunity as possible to avail themselves of support and advice. With that, I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Anderson: I speak as a recently reappointed member of the Committee for Social Development. I am on a steep learning curve with all the welfare reform that is taking place. The field of welfare benefits is vast, complex and rapidly changing. As MLAs with busy constituency advice centres, Members will be all too well aware that the welfare and benefits system is of great relevance to an increasing number of people. A significant percentage of my work as a public representative is taken up with advising and helping people with a range of entitlements.

We are now seeing the fallout from the reform of incapacity benefit, which more than 80,000 people in Northern Ireland claim. As a result of the recent changes, about 50% of them have had their case reviewed. Of these, some 12,500 have been told that they will lose their benefit as they are considered fit for work, and about 8,000 are appealing that decision. Many of those people are and will be coming to our constituency offices to seek help. That is just one example. We will obviously see more examples with the ongoing major welfare reform across the UK.

I broadly support the motion. It draws attention to the importance of ensuring that the public have access to relevant information about benefits and entitlements. We should all support that. The motion also asks for adequate funding. I am in favour of that, too, and a lot is already being done in that regard. People need to know about entitlements. As changes in the system continue to work their way through, there will be further pressures on all agencies and groups that offer advice. There are various ways in which we can provide information. We live in an age of instant communication. For most of us, it would be hard to imagine life without the internet, but, in the area of benefit entitlement and uptake, we deal with some of the most vulnerable, so we must make sure that advice is well targeted. Not everyone is online. Some people cannot afford to be. Others who live in isolated rural areas have poor internet provision or maybe do not have it at all. That is a separate issue that needs to be addressed. Also, not everyone has easy access to transport to visit Citizens Advice centres and other such places. We must advertise widely in the media, in newspapers and on television and

radio. Programmes such as 'On Your Behalf' on Radio Ulster are an excellent way of getting information across. In fact, a recent edition of that programme dealt with welfare reform.

The Minister has already shown and continues to show a high level of commitment to making sure that help is targeted and that people are aware of all that they are entitled to. I will highlight a few recent and ongoing initiatives. One of the Minister's first actions on his appointment in 2011 was to allocate extra funding to the Social Security Agency's benefit take-up programme. That has helped a lot of people to obtain help and support, largely in the age group of 60 and over. In these days of limited financial resources, it goes without saying that there is a clear need — more than ever before — for joined-up thinking and a joined-up approach between the various voluntary and community groups and the statutory agencies. There is a need for maximum efficiency. I know that the Opening Doors strategy aims to achieve all of that.

The Minister recently stated in the House that a further £3·5 million would be committed from 1 October 2012 to 31 March 2015 to the Northern Ireland Advice Services Alliance Consortium, which is made up of Advice NI, Citizens Advice NI and the Law Centre NI to provide regional support to the advice sector. The Minister's discussion paper 'Maximising Incomes and Outcomes' is also aimed at improving the uptake of benefits. I look forward to the Minister outlining a final plan on that in due course.

The Minister also allocates funding to councils through the community support programme. My council — Craigavon Borough Council — has received £326,000 from that programme. Of that, £58,169 is ring-fenced for advice service provision. The council has also allocated £104,266 of its funds, which means that Craigavon citizens advice bureau and LIAISE, an independent advice organisation, receive total funding of £163,435. Perhaps there is an increased role for local councils to play in that area, especially in light of the impending review of public administration.

Much is being done, and limited resources are being carefully targeted, but, as is always the case, we need to keep focused and ensure that the public are fully informed and get their financial entitlements. I support the motion.

1.15 pm

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I listened with interest to all the Members who spoke in the debate, and I thank all those who contributed for their input. I wish to respond to all the issues that were raised during the debate. However, if there are issues that I cannot cover in the detail requested, I will write to the Members concerned as soon as possible following the conclusion of the sitting.

I warmly welcome the debate and wish to respond positively to the motion. As Minister for Social Development, I have responsibility for urban regeneration and community development, in addition to housing, social security benefits, pensions and child maintenance. My Department is, therefore, to the fore in tackling issues of disadvantage, and, through everything that it does, it is directly involved in helping people and communities to improve their lives. I am fully committed to tackling disadvantage and to building strong and vibrant communities across Northern Ireland. In that context, I give a high priority to building capacity and to looking at measures that will mitigate the negative impacts of poverty on individuals and their families, households and communities.

Like all of you, I am acutely aware of the significant and complex changes that we are embarking on as a result of the reform of our welfare system, the consequences of which are likely to impact on most parts of our society. Let us ensure that we protect the most vulnerable, and let us work as a collective to mitigate the worst aspects of the planned changes and to deliver the best possible outcome for the people of Northern Ireland.

Our advice sector plays a vital role in supporting people through the changes that will arise from the welfare reforms. I fully recognise the challenges that this period of substantial change will bring for the advice sector in Northern Ireland. Those challenges are faced by government and the advice sector, and there is an onus on both to maximise the impact of scarce resources to ensure that individuals can readily access good advice services. I want to work — indeed, continue to work — with the advice sector organisations and to harness their excellent resource and expertise as we go forward.

My Department has devised and introduced a strategy for advice services in Northern Ireland. I note that the need for a strategy was mentioned. That strategy, known as Opening Doors, is geared to helping to support an integrated, quality advice service across Northern Ireland. The strategy is already there, and it provides a framework to ensure that advice services are planned and delivered in a way that matches resources to need, focusing particularly on meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged. The key objectives of Opening Doors include maximising access to basic advice; resourcing the future of the advice sector; providing high-quality advice; and using existing resources effectively. I encourage all Members to get a copy of the strategy or to download it and study it carefully.

A key part of the advice strategy is the need for government to work in partnership with advice sector organisations to ensure the provision of good, easy-to-access services. My Department is already leading this work. As a first step, we asked the main advice-providing organisations in Northern Ireland to work together in partnership and as a consortium and to become a strategic partner with the Department in addressing issues on advice provision. This consortium is known as the Northern Ireland Advice Services Alliance Consortium, and its members are Citizens Advice, Advice NI and the Law Centre. The focus of our relationship with this advice consortium is to provide and target support for the provision of advice services to meet identified need.

Going forward, the advice consortium has a key role to play in building and supporting the capacity and capability of front line advice providers; securing joined-up and targeted service delivery; exploring alternative funding streams; and maximising the impact of the substantial resources that we have invested in advice. The advice consortium will also monitor advice activity on the ground and will let the Department know about emerging trends and issues. That will be supported by reliable information and statistics. That work is crucial if we are to target

scarce resources to help claimants to deal with the impacts of welfare reform. Identifying and targeting the need for advice services in that way will allow government to respond in circumstances where specific robust evidence of changing demand has been identified. In other words, we want to make sure that those who need help get help.

Our work with the advice consortium and local councils means that we will be able to act appropriately when we begin to receive robust, reliable information detailing changes in demand for services. We will support advice providers so that they, in turn, can provide important support to our communities. My Department's commitment to providing access to advice services has seen us make a substantial financial commitment, in the region of £4·5 million each year, for advice provision: general advice; benefit advice; housing advice; and advice to help people claim any benefits that they are entitled to.

Local councils also work with officials in my Department and provide an additional £1·9 million each year for front line advice services. Collectively, therefore, that brings a total investment of approximately £6·4 million each year, with that funding geared to ensuring that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to free, independent advice and that those providing the advice are trained to a high standard and are supported to enable them to carry out their role. That funding represents a substantial investment in advice services, and that should not be underestimated. For that reason, we do and will continue to monitor how the investment is spent to ensure that services are indeed reaching those in most need. That quite rightly takes the form of robust monitoring and review arrangements, and I make no apology for that. It is the right thing to do.

Beyond my own Department, many other Departments also provide funding for advice services, in keeping with their own departmental priorities. By way of example, DETI provides funding for specific debt advice, and the Department of Health provides funding to support a range of health advice services. Much of that work is complementary to the work of my Department and will help support claimants through the welfare reforms. I warmly welcome that.

As we move forward with the welfare reforms, I fully recognise the need to promote awareness and to keep individuals informed of changes. Once again, my Department is already leading the work, and plans are already at an advanced stage to ensure that appropriate arrangements for advice services are in place and that claimants are fully aware of the changes. We must use all channels open to us and consider different ways to reach communities. There is a need for the advice sector to consider the best way in which to provide good advice and easy access to it; for example, with greater use of information technology to support communication and service delivery.

In parallel with that partnership work with the advice sector, there is significant work being done in my Department to make sure that our claimants are fully aware of the changes ahead. I know of the anxiety and confusion that many in our society feel because there is uncertainty around welfare reform. I am committed to keeping individuals informed. We have a dedicated team already in place in the Social Security Agency to engage with all stakeholders but particularly claimants and their representative groups.

In early spring, I will launch an awareness campaign on welfare reform that will include the distribution of an information leaflet to all households in Northern Ireland. It will provide important information on the current arrangements, the changes arising from welfare reform, who is likely to be affected and when the changes will happen. Together with the advice consortium, officials are also working with local councils to ensure that they are aware of changes and to give assurance to front line advice providers that monitoring processes are in place to ensure that they have the necessary support to deal with welfare reform queries when they begin to impact. The advice consortium, in collaboration with the Social Security Agency, will also provide training for front line advice providers on the changes resulting from welfare reform. Also, as part of the ongoing consultation on criteria for universal credit flexible payments and the introduction of discretionary support for Northern Ireland, my officials have undertaken a comprehensive programme of engagement with the voluntary and community sector and the general public.

My Department is committed to promoting benefit uptake, and in the past year alone our benefit uptake campaign has encouraged 4,000 mainly older people to claim additional support of £13·1 million through an awareness campaign and partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. We will also continue to provide advice and information through our Social Security Agency network. We provide advice and support to claimants through services available at their nearest jobs and benefits office and through the enhanced telephone service provided under Customer First. The agency provides accurate, timely and consistent information to claimants.

I know that there are concerns around welfare reform and housing. I have major concerns around the issues a reduction in housing benefit will cause, in particular the impacts of the underoccupation restriction for the social sector. I recognise that the coalition Government have brought forward these proposals and, in keeping with the principle of parity, we are compelled to do the same. I am keen to ensure that appropriate housing services are put in place, which is why I recently tasked the Housing Executive and housing association movement to bring forward an action plan that will provide a range of support measures to mitigate the welfare reform changes and support the households affected by them. I recently brought those plans to the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform and asked Ministers to comment on their content.

I consider that early awareness of the extent of the changes to benefits will help households to prepare for reforms, anticipate their situation and smooth the demand for advice and support. The Housing Executive, as the body responsible for administering housing benefit, intends to write over the next few months and inform all affected households about the financial implications of the entitlement changes. That will include tenants living in housing association accommodation. My officials have worked closely with Housing Executive colleagues in order for them to be able to prepare specific leaflets for publication on the nature of the reforms. The intention is to use other supporting tools to communicate the changes, some of which are already up and running. They will

include new website pages, an information video and an online calculator.

Mr Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes, very quickly.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he advise householders how to downsize to properties that are simply not there?

Mr McCausland: I have identified already that the issue of underoccupation causes us all concern. It is not actually what is before us today, but I acknowledge the Member's point.

A telephone contact service and housing advice service will be put in place to raise tenant awareness and to contact social tenants affected to help them consider their housing options. That will include — this perhaps goes some way towards addressing the previous point — promoting and assisting tenant mobility by helping them move to more appropriately sized housing; where possible, supporting tenants to pay their rent; examining options that can be put to tenants who need to move to a smaller home, consider downsizing etc; facilitating home swaps, promoting the mutual exchange scheme or advising on other initiatives; and putting in place plans and procedures for dealing with tenants who fall into arrears as a result of the reforms. In addition, further support for the various groups of people who may be impacted may be available by way of discretionary housing payments. The Housing Executive is looking at the current rules and procedures for such payments and intends to consult on future arrangements for their payment.

There are, indeed, challenging times ahead of us all: for our communities, for government and for advice providers. In my remaining minute and a half, I will pick up on a couple of points from the debate, including something that Mark Durkan said. It is important that our engagement with the consortium is detailed, consistent and ongoing. Beyond the quarterly detailed meetings, meetings are held monthly and, indeed, weekly with people from the sector. I took the opportunity on Friday to visit a citizens advice bureau in my constituency to hear from staff about their experience. So, work is ongoing there. The benefit uptake programme is a success. The Member spoke about Chinese whispers. Therefore, it is important that we provide as much information as possible, so that problems do not arise from rumours, unfounded reports or whatever.

Michael Copeland said that I was presiding over the progress of the Welfare Reform Bill. He then seemed to seek to detach or distance himself from welfare reform. I find that rather strange. I see that Michael Copeland has left us. It rather lacks credibility because I am sure that, as a good and loyal party member, at the last election he would have been out there campaigning on the doors and on the streets, day by day for the Ulster Conservatives and Unionists – New Force (UCUNF) candidate in his constituency. I have no doubt that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is almost up.

Mr McCausland: —as a good candidate, he would have done that. I am sure that he would have. As a good, loyal member, he would not have done anything else; you could not expect it. Of course, he would always remember from those days that David Cameron and, if he had got somebody elected —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

Mr McCausland: — he would have managed to find himself toeing the Tory line and implementing the Tory cuts.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister's time is up.

1.30 pm

Mrs McKevitt: I am pleased to speak on the motion, and I pay a special thank you to all who contributed. Encouraging benefit uptake is of the utmost importance, especially as we are in the process of what has been described as the biggest shake up of the welfare system. "Confusing", "complicated" and "complex" — those are the words that constituents of South Down use to describe the welfare system.

For every benefit application, a form needs to be completed, and, for our elderly in particular, that can be a daunting task. Many decide not to bother applying and take the attitude that they will probably not be any better off at the end. That attitude, in many instances, is wrong. It is up to us to ensure that individuals have access to independent advice and assistance on welfare so that people can receive all the benefits that they are entitled to. To make that possible, it is imperative that independent advice providers receive adequate funding.

I pay tribute to all independent advice providers. Citizens Advice and Advice NI are two such charities that come to mind. Both are real lifelines to many, and, since changes in the welfare system began, both have found themselves overwhelmingly inundated with calls from individuals seeking advice. The need for welfare assistance in my constituency is so great that my office now holds a welfare clinic on a Friday to give constituents an opportunity to speak to a professional welfare adviser who can assist and guide them through the maze of the benefit system.

I recognise the efforts of the Minister for Social Development to encourage benefit uptake through the development of specific programmes and campaigns, such as Make the Call, which increase benefit uptake numbers. The Social Security Agency's activities and information pamphlets have also gone some way to inform claimants of additional benefits, especially our society's most vulnerable, but we still have more to do to ensure that the people in our society know what benefits they could be entitled to.

I am pleased that we are shining a light on this important issue today. I understand that the consultation on the discussion paper 'Maximising Incomes and Outcomes' ended on 26 February, and I look forward to the implementation of the strategy. I support the call for the advice services strategy and further funding for independent advice providers, just like each of the Members who spoke today and are supportive of the motion.

Mark H Durkan spoke on the importance of advice centres, the service that they deliver and their importance to the public representatives. He spoke about the increasing demand that there will be with welfare reform change and said that 53% of over-16s are claiming benefits. He also spoke about the appeals, the work capability assessments and the way things could be lost in the systems without the advice sector. He spoke about safeguarding those who are entitled to benefits, the mistrust of the statutory authorities,

the new systems, like the IT processing systems, the community-based advice centres and the support that is needed for them.

Alex Maskey outlined the thoughts of the Committee on the key element of welfare reform. He talked about proper access to independent advice and how important that is for the claimant getting their benefits and entitlements, particularly around fuel poverty and childcare, where there is a lack of awareness around entitlements.

Paula Bradley spoke about the incoming welfare reforms, the misunderstanding around the changes, the scaremongering in local communities and the independent advice centres like Citizens Advice. She spoke about how good an example that is, and said that people need to be aware of where to go to for advice.

Michael Copeland also spoke on the advice sector, the lack of resources and the vision for that sector. He spoke about the crucial role of independent advice centres, the 250,000 enquiries on the Welfare Reform Bill and the uncertainty around that.

Judith Cochrane spoke about the ongoing recession and the strain that it is causing. People are worried about the changes and need clarification around those. She also mentioned the appeals, the office cost expenditure decreasing and the increases that will cause to the advice services that come from constituency offices. The finances that will need to be available for the training were also mentioned.

Pam Brown spoke about how critical it is that every assistance is available to manage change in welfare reform, particularly around vulnerable groups and their future entitlement to benefits. She also spoke about the importance of awareness of childcare vouchers and thanked the Members for tabling the motion.

Mickey Brady spoke about the importance of advice centres and the shambles of work capability assessments. He spoke about welfare reform, universal credit and the cross-community work of advice centres. He also spoke about the closure of three community offices and how important those were to rural areas.

Colum Eastwood said that he was glad that there was support for the motion across the House. He spoke about the 120,000 children in poverty and said that there is no sense that that figure will get better. He talked about the concerns around welfare reform and said that we need to do everything that we can to help the 232,000 families who were not aware that they were entitled to childcare benefits.

Sydney Anderson spoke about the complex changes to welfare reform, the importance of advice centres and the 80,000 people who claim incapacity benefit. He went on to talk about how 50% of those cases were reviewed and the outcome of that. He also spoke about public access to, and advice about, benefits and the importance of that, particularly for the vulnerable in this society and people in rural areas. He spoke about the £3·5 million that was allocated to advice services in October 2012. The Minister also touched on that.

I am glad that the Minister has come here and spoken positively on the motion. After all, it is about helping people and communities. I am pleased that he is looking at measures. I welcome his commitments, his positive response to the motion and his recognition of the challenges ahead. I acknowledge his response about the strategy being in place, but it needs to be reviewed and revised in the context of welfare reform. I would like to think that the Minister will take that on board. I liked his attitude when he said that those who need help will get help. I have no doubt that everybody in the House will hold you to that comment.

I thank those who took part in the debate for all their support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the challenges facing the advice sector and the need for individuals to have access to advice and assistance in relation to their welfare rights; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to devise an advice services strategy, to develop an awareness campaign for individuals and to provide adequate funding for independent advice providers.

Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly notes the publication of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; supports the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates; welcomes the recognition within the Bill that political donations in Northern Ireland require sensitivity; acknowledges that further work is needed on measures that are still under consideration for potential inclusion in the Bill, including the creation of a formal Opposition in the Assembly, the size of the Assembly and the length of the Assembly term; and calls on all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster or to forfeit the expenses that they claim from Parliament.*

Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will give me a little latitude to begin by paying tribute to Sir George Quigley, who very sadly passed away quite suddenly yesterday. Sir George was a remarkable man. He was a leading civil servant, then a leading a businessman and, in a third career, a leading civic leader for Northern Ireland. Sir George Quigley was a true polymath. I had hoped that we would discuss him as a matter of the day. I am irked, and I think that it is deeply ironic, that what we ended up discussing was the mortar find in Londonderry, which focused us on people who have nothing to offer Northern Ireland as opposed to Sir George, who spent a lifetime trying to build a better future. I pay tribute to him and send the sympathies of the party to Lady Moyra.

The draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is an opportunity to build a better future, and I hope that we will not let it slip because it is a true opportunity to take the next bold steps towards normalisation and the introduction of normal politics in this House and for these institutions. It is timely, coming 15 years after the Belfast Agreement, which brought the original Assembly to the Chamber. However, the arrangements of 15 years ago were always meant to be transitional, to help us on a journey, which we are still on, towards normalisation.

Therefore, when defining the success of the draft Bill, we need to focus on the underlying values and principles that we supported 15 years ago: the spirit of the agreement; the fact that Northern Ireland is secure as part of the United Kingdom for as long as the majority of the people here so wish; the primacy of the rule of law; politics is for all, but terror is for none, although, sadly, some still think that terrorism is the way forward; mutual respect; inclusivity; and consensual politics. Those elements make up the spirit of the Belfast Agreement, which my party continues to support. The time is ripe to review how far we have come in the past 15 years and how far we have yet to go.

As I said, the 2013 draft Bill is an opportunity to reflect on where we are and where we need to go.

We have tinkered with, some would say corrupted, what was put in place and agreed by referendum in 1998. At St Andrews in 2006, many changes were introduced that we could not support as a party, not least the corruption of the election on a joint ticket of the First and the deputy First Ministers, which parties now play to their advantage at election time. Another change was the introduction of checks and balances, which some Ministers have mentioned in the past couple of weeks. That is one reason why the processes of the Executive and the House are so slow that people fail to see any semblance of delivery.

In 2010, of course, we had Hillsborough and the decision to devolve policing and justice powers, which the Ulster Unionist Party opposed. We feel vindicated in the rationale for our opposition on hearing over the past few weeks the debate about the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the fact that Northern Ireland is to be the only part of the United Kingdom where the agency will not operate to protect our citizens' lives and well-being.

So, in short, although the draft Bill presents an opportunity, as currently constituted, it lacks a certain ambition. We should be more ambitious in calling on the Secretary of State to take those steps to normalisation, and the biggest and most significant single step that she could take would be to support the establishment of an official opposition in the House: an opposition loyal to the institutions of devolution.

What would that mean? It would not mean a return to majority rule. The Ulster Unionist Party is clear that, if we introduce an official opposition, you will still need a cross-community Government. That is guaranteed as far as this party is concerned. An official opposition would offer choice and would be given some resources, so we are not talking about a party simply walking away from the Executive, which is an idea that some of my former colleagues have promoted. We are talking about the establishment of an officially recognised opposition. What does that mean? It means having the same as in Dublin, London, Cardiff and Edinburgh: supply days, speaking rights, research resources and all the normal support that an opposition has.

I said that, 15 years ago, we went for a set of transitional arrangements. The challenge back then was to get everybody into the political tent. Now that we are all in, the challenge is to look at and acknowledge the unmet challenges from 1998: dealing with the past, reconciliation and a truly shared future. All might be best addressed by the formation of a Government and an official opposition. I call on the Secretary of State to review her draft Bill and to push ahead to create the space called "opposition" that will take us on that huge step towards normalisation in this House.

The Bill should be about more than moving to end dual mandates and transparency on political donations, important as those are. The Ulster Unionist Party has led the way in the ending of dual mandates at some cost to itself — *[Interruption.]* The Member may find that amusing, but history will not.

Mr McDevitt: I think that electorate sorted that out for you.

Mr Nesbitt: That is a very cheap shot coming in from South Belfast. The party took a principled stand, as we did in 1998, and we were prepared to take the cost to our party to stand on principle.

1.45 pm

I will move on to transparency in political donations. I think that every party would like to see transparency, but we must have the conditions that allow it. In our view, those conditions do not exist, and we direct you to Londonderry and the events of the past 24 hours. Terrorism is still a threat in many ways.

If we are looking for true transparency, let us have transparency from our own Executive, which still will not tell us how many people accompanied the First and deputy First Minister on their trade mission to China, what hotels they stayed in, what class of travel they undertook or the cost to the taxpayer. The same Executive will not publish business cases so that Members of this Assembly can examine, scrutinise and decide whether a robust case was put forward for the spending of public money on, for example, the Victims and Survivors Service. That Executive will not even publish the research that they commissioned from Colliers International into whether Maze/Long Kesh should be the venue for a peace-building and reconciliation centre. What do they have to hide that means that they cannot be transparent? So, the Ulster Unionist Party wishes to see provision for opposition in the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

We also call for those who support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster or to sacrifice their expenses. According to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, expenses claimed by Sinn Féin MPs in the financial year 2011-12 were as follows: Pat Doherty claimed £135,000; Michelle Gildernew claimed £99,000; Martin McGuinness, the deputy First Minister, claimed £108,000; Paul Maskey claimed £92,000; and Conor Murphy claimed £131,000. That is a total of £569,000. In addition, there was £100,000 in the equivalent of short money. Clearly, those are matters for the House of Commons, but it will not be lost on that House that Sinn Féin's decision to stand down its double-jobbing MPs and MLAs was about maxing office cost allowances and expenses.

If I were an Irish republican, I could imagine how I could have made an argument some time ago for abstentionism, particularly at Westminster. Perhaps the conditions at one point existed for that. However, they do not exist any more — not since the Belfast Agreement and not since people such as Peter Brooke talked about the United Kingdom not having any further "selfish ... or strategic interest" in Northern Ireland. As a tactic, abstentionism has had its day.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Nesbitt: I say to the Members on the opposite Benches: take your seats or give up your expenses. I encourage all those who will vote in Mid Ulster on Thursday to vote for a candidate who will be a full-time Member of Parliament.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Dickson: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out from "welcomes" to "sensitivity" and substitute

"believes that the declaration and publication of donations to political parties in Northern Ireland should be handled in the same manner as donations to political parties in Great Britain".

Currently, Members of this House must report to the Electoral Commission details of any donations from permissible sources over £1,500, and political parties in Northern Ireland have to contribute information to the commission about donations of over £7,500 from a single source. However, the names of donors are not made public, as they are in the rest of the United Kingdom.

My party, the Alliance Party, has made a voluntary commitment to publish information in line with the United Kingdom arrangements and has followed through on that commitment. In April last year, my party colleague Naomi Long MP asked the Prime Minister to commit to changing the legislation to make local parties publish their list of significant donors. We believe that the public in Northern Ireland should have access to the same information as people in England, Scotland and Wales on how political parties are funded and who their major donors are. The public can then judge for themselves whether those donors have any undue influence on party policy. It is important that parties be open and transparent about how they are funded.

Legislation designed for the worst of the Troubles needs now to be amended to reflect the fact that Northern Ireland has moved significantly. We cannot, on the one hand, talk about normalisation and tell people that Northern Ireland has transformed into a safe destination for inward investment and tourism and require companies to publish their accounts and details of their directors and share-holders, and, on the other hand, use security concerns as a reason to avoid being transparent about party political donations. The time for that is over. Now is the time, and the challenge that I give to every party in this House, bar one that has done the same as the Alliance Party, is to publish your donations in line with the commission's recommendations. Stop hiding your donations.

It is worth noting that the vast majority of donors would not be affected in any way by the change bringing us into line with Great Britain, because only larger donations need to be declared. It is important to recognise that similar information is already in the public domain, because the names of those who nominate and sign nomination papers for election are published and always have been published, right through all the terrible times that we have come through. Therefore, the security argument simply does not wash. If others are serious about openness and transparency, I encourage them to support our amendment and to join us in supporting a change in the law at Westminster to bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the United Kingdom. In the interim, I urge all parties to follow our example and publish that information voluntarily.

I turn now to the rest of the motion. The Alliance Party has also acted voluntarily to end MP/MLA mandates, with Naomi Long stepping down within weeks of being elected to Westminster. We do not believe that MPs should be permitted to continue as Members of the Assembly. It was argued that the instability of the Assembly structures put the mandate of senior political figures at risk in the event of the collapse of these institutions following a resignation from Westminster. That is arguably redundant, given that we are well into the second successive uninterrupted term

of the Assembly. No Members of the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly sit in the House of Commons, and we should follow suit. An MLA and an MP are two separate, distinct and full-time jobs, requiring a focus that cannot be effectively achieved if a representative has a dual mandate and, consequently, competing demands on his or her time. The situation is further exacerbated where that MP is also a Minister in the Executive.

As MLAs, we must be here in Stormont to vote on legislation, to question our Ministers, to attend and engage with Committees and to hold the Executive to account. That is what we were elected to this House to do. Equally, MPs are required in Westminster for a large proportion the week to vote, scrutinise and provide a voice for their constituents in that place. Although there are many considerable overlaps in the constituency casework element of both, the location and time of those parliamentary duties make it incompatible for any Member to fulfil both roles simultaneously. They are simply not doing their job, and I challenge any Members of Parliament or of the Assembly who hold that dual role to tell me that they are doing their job effectively.

No person can be in two places at once. That is evidenced by the attendance and voting record of those who have held or continue to hold dual mandates in this Parliament compared with those who do not. Moreover, ending dual mandates provides an opportunity for parties to introduce new talent and to make our parliamentary Chambers more representative. We talk an awful lot about trying to get people interested in politics. Here is a way of freeing up some jobs and encouraging new talent into the pool of politics in Northern Ireland. It is a step that we can take to achieve that aim.

Finally, the reduction in the amount of office cost expenditure available to an MLA who is also an MP means that the number of staff members and the amount of resources available to someone with a dual mandate is greatly reduced when compared with two representatives undertaking each role separately. Some may argue that that allows for efficiency in expenditure, but we are concerned that constituents in areas represented by those holding dual mandates will have less access to, and potentially less assistance from, offices of elected representatives.

Related to that is the level of representation provided by those who do not take their seat in Westminster. They may argue that they have a mandate for that stance; indeed, that may be what the majority view of those who elected you is. However, what about all those constituents who have not voted for you but are entitled to equal representation? That representation requires you to go to Westminster and represent them. They are meant to represent all their constituents; after all, few, if any, elected representatives tell us that they do anything else other than represent all their constituents. What about the important issues, such as welfare reform, that are being debated and decided at Westminster? The position of not taking one's seat is extremely irresponsible. The people of those constituencies deserve better.

On the size of the Assembly, we have made our position clear on a number of occasions. Others need to bring similar clarity to the table, if we are going to move forward, and also on the issue of the extension of the term of the Assembly to avoid unnecessary clashes with other elections.

Finally, on the subject of an opposition, it has long been the view of the Alliance Party, throughout the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement and the subsequent negotiations and reforms, that democracy in Northern Ireland would be best served by a properly funded, properly structured, formal opposition. We are not opposed to enabling legislation being put in place. However, we are possibly many years away from that actually being formulated. Opposition is already enshrined, to an extent, in the Committee system in the House. Evidence we recently received at the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) made clear the difficulties faced in establishing an effective and formal opposition here.

It is clear that that will require significant debate and discussion. I welcome the fact that that debate is ongoing. However, given the divided nature of society, it would be a sign of politics maturing if we were able to effect a transition towards a Government and opposition model of governance. We recognise that the current system was endorsed as part of the Good Friday Agreement, that any transition requires the consent of the Assembly and that we certainly need to move beyond the sectarian headcount style of politics that has been demonstrated recently, if we are to facilitate an effective and formal opposition based on a voluntary agreement. Remember, one of the tenets of an opposition is the ability to one day become the Government. We support the motion and encourage Members to support our amendment.

Mr Givan: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. I will just pick up on a couple of points that the proposer of the motion outlined. It is an opportunity for normal politics to be established. However, I think that the proposer of the motion would need to check with his party as to why, in the Belfast Agreement, it did not put in that it was only ever going to be transitional. If it had, we would not now be requiring a change to come through Westminster. Had that been achieved at the Belfast Agreement, one could take more credence with the argument about this being a transitional arrangement. However, I agree with the argument that this should be transitional. A more normalised form of democracy in Northern Ireland is something that we would wish to see.

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

The proposer indicated that the St Andrews Agreement corrupted the Belfast Agreement. We reject that. He indicated that, at Hillsborough, the party was right to oppose the devolution of policing and justice at that time. I remind the Member that the Ulster Unionist Party had signed up to policing and justice, many years before, at a previous deal that was done. Then, the elections happened, and that did not happen. It is important that we put forward arguments but that we do not expose ourselves to the inconsistent approach that is being taken now to try to rewrite a little bit of history.

That having been said, the motion is an opportunity for the Bill going through Westminster to try to make changes. I agree with the argument that we have overlapping elections. It is not, for one moment, that we disagree, for our own political advantage, with Westminster and Assembly elections taking place at the same time. Indeed, one could argue that, in those types of elections, our big

hitters usually poll better than Assembly Members and that, therefore, we would get a bounce in the Assembly if that were the case.

So, it certainly is not from the point of view of political advantage, but we take the argument that there is overlapping and that it is better to have an election on a separate date. It is what happens in Scotland and Wales, and we think it should happen in Northern Ireland so that we get that distinction. We can then have an election based on Assembly issues, as opposed to being clouded between a Westminster election and the Assembly. That is something that I would like to see the Bill change.

2.00 pm

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree that we should decouple Westminster elections from Assembly elections. However, does he not agree that it would be better to bring Assembly elections forward, rather than putting them back a year? I do not think that we can have too much democracy, but I think that there is a genuine issue of a democratic deficit, were we to be in term for a year longer than we were elected to be.

Mr Givan: The Member makes a point that is worth considering. One may say that Members stood for election for a four-year term, and to shorten that is not why we put ourselves before the electorate. However, this party fears no election being called early. That certainly is not an issue for us. From an electoral point of view, we are confident that the positions that we have taken resonate with the people. However, the Member's point is certainly worth considering.

We do not wish to have a return to majority rule. That is an argument that we made at the Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC). That is not what we want. We have outlined where we think we can reach some kind of consensus around a type of weighted majority system that would ensure that a minority community will always be protected. It may be develop a better form of democracy than that which currently exists in this place, and that is something that I think should be explored.

It is important to say that, if we can get agreement in the Assembly, it is much more likely that we can make the point to the Secretary of State in taking the Bill through. She has made it clear that she will not force through some sort of change. So the onus is on us, in the Assembly, to find common ground so that we can make agreements that, ultimately, the Secretary of State can implement. That is something that we would wish to see happen. Those discussions are ongoing, and I encourage everybody to be part of them in a positive manner.

It is worth pointing out that this party, which has Members of Parliament, has led the way with respect to dual mandates. It is easy for the Ulster Unionist Party to take a principled stand on this, now that the electorate has taken care of any MPs that it had. However, we have withdrawn most of our MPs from the Assembly. We led on that, and it is our policy that, ultimately, that should be carried into effect.

The Conservative Party, however, would do well, when it talks about double-jobbing, to look at its Front Bench and identify how many Tory Ministers are also on executive boards. Some of those Ministers receive much more financial gain from the activities that they are involved in outside of politics, and then that party could take a more principled position in talking about double-jobbing. It would be consistent if the Conservative Party were to take that forward in the Bill as well, and deal with those Members of Parliament who are not doing their job in the Conservative Party, when it comes to focusing solely on their duties at Westminster.

We can have an opposition here. However, I say to Members that the two smaller parties in the Executive have access to confidential papers which then seem to make their way into the public domain. So there is a sham fight taking place; the smaller parties want an opposition on one hand but, when they get information, they do not subject themselves to collectivity the way the rest of us, the two bigger parties that are trying to push Northern Ireland forward, have to do. So, if the smaller parties take themselves out of the Executive, they can have their opposition. I agree that should be properly resourced and we should have an official-type opposition. However, you cannot have it both ways. If you are in the Executive, take your collective agreements and sign up to that collectivity, or else you decide, officially —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Givan: — to go outside the Executive and be in the opposition.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I wish to speak against this motion.

From the outset, I thought that the speech by the leader of the UUP was going to be a thinly veiled attack on Sinn Féin. Those fears were confirmed in the last three minutes of his speech, which were aimed at Sinn Féin. He also raised the issue of the NCA. I do not want to stray from the motion too far, but I stand in awe of the Member's toughness against crime. I still wonder when he will come out and condemn the illegal blockading of our roads over the last few months, but we will wait for that. Also, I presume that the Member would like to write Sinn Féin's manifesto as well as his own. Sinn Féin is very clear in its manifesto: it has a clear policy on abstentionism, and I say that also to the Member from the Alliance Party. Do you expect us to say that we are an abstentionist party and then go and take our seats? Of course not. Do we still represent our constituents? Of course we do. Do we get paid expenses in the same way as every other party for representing constituents? Yes we do, and there is no reason why those expenses should be withdrawn.

I will look at a couple of other issues in the motion. There is the issue of political donations. Of course, Sinn Féin stands for transparency — complete transparency — unlike the other parties in the Assembly that are humming and hawing about it. Let us be clear: we want complete transparency, and I think that we are the only party in the Assembly that has called for that. When we talk about an opposition, it seems that the first item on the agenda is resources. Would the party show some principle now and again and say, "We are pulling out of the Executive and are going into opposition, whether or not we are resourced for it"? However, it is all about expenses going into the back pocket.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. I encourage him to read Hansard tomorrow, because he will see that the first issue that I raised was supply days, not resources or money.

Mr Sheehan: I will not quibble about whether it was said first or second. The Member said that an opposition should be given some resources.

I will move on to dual mandates and the great leadership that has been given by the other parties in the House about ending dual mandates. I must have missed something along the way, particularly from the Ulster Unionists and their leadership on ending dual mandates, because I thought that the electorate did that job for them. However, I will stand corrected on that if I am wrong. Sinn Féin is the only party in the House that has ended dual mandates. Let us be clear about this —

Mr Allister: Is that including the IRA?

Mr Sheehan: Let us be clear about double-jobbing because there seems to have been a redefinition somewhere along the line.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member will resume his seat. I heard remarks from the back that were not appropriate to the debate. I do not expect to hear them again. The Member may continue.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order in the House — certainly it should not be done from a sedentary position, I understand that — to point out the duplicity of Sinn Féin? I am referring to the double mandate that it claimed for years for terror, manifest in membership both of the IRA and Sinn Féin.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I take it that the Member wished to make a contribution to the debate. That certainly was not a point of order. My function is to ensure, as far as possible, that Members stay on the motion, and I am sure that all Members will support me in that.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We are used to that type of sniping from the Back Benches. Nevertheless, we will try to carry on as best we can.

There has been a redefinition of dual mandates, or double-jobbing, somewhere along the line, which I have missed. It is not only the double-jobbing of Westminster MPs and MLAs in the Assembly but the double-jobbing of MLAs and councillors. I wonder whether the leader of the Ulster Unionists would like to stand up now — I will give way if he wants me to — and tell me whether he has done away with that double-jobbing. That is as important as double-jobbing between MPs and MLAs.

We do not support the motion, and we do not think that the amendment from the Alliance Party makes any substantive change to it. On that basis, we will oppose both.

Mr McDevitt: To date, the debate has been slightly bizarre. There is a Committee in the House called the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. I am a member of it, Mr Sheehan is a member of it and Mr Givan is a member of it. I cannot remember whether the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party is currently a member, but he certainly has been. What has that Committee been tasked to do for the past six months but review the operation of Parts 3 and 4 of the Northern Ireland Act and deal with some of the issues provided for in the proposed legislation from Westminster? Why would any parliamentarian with any respect for any Committee in the House table a motion that seeks to pre-empt, compromise and prejudice the debate taking place in that Committee?

We know that the Ulster Unionist Party is confused about its commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. It is ironic that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is one of only two Committees mentioned in the Northern Ireland Act that arose from the Good Friday Agreement, but you would think that, irrespective of how dodgy that party may be on the substantive issue of whether it is pro-agreement, anti-agreement, pseudo-agreement or post-agreement, it would at least respect the integrity of this institution and the Committees mandated by this Assembly and plenary to do certain jobs of work. On that ground alone, the motion deserves to be defeated today. The debate is not one for the Chamber; it is one for the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which would prepare a report that should, and must, be debated in the Chamber in due course.

I have to say that hearing the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party appeal to the House to support the values of the Good Friday Agreement and then call for support and votes for the unionist unity candidate in Mid Ulster on Thursday was hearing a man say, on the left hand, that he is in favour of 1998 and, on the right hand, that an anti-agreement man should be voted into Westminster. Which is it? Whatever happened to the noble strand of Irish unionism that was proud to have made an honourable agreement with Irish nationalism, or is that now just the job of the Alliance Party?

Stewart Dickson said that we needed to do like the rest of Great Britain. We are not in Great Britain. That is the point. We may be in the UK by consent, but we are not in Great Britain, and we do not have to do the same as Great Britain. That is not the point of devolution. The point of devolution is that the House makes rules in the interests of the people of this region, and the people of this region live in Northern Ireland. It is constitutionally part of the UK and geographically part of Ireland, and coming to the House with amendments that confuse the two in the most cack-handed way possible is short-sighted.

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: I will in a second.

It is short-sighted and falls into the trap laid by the Ulster Unionist Party: "We want to sound pro-agreement but act anti-agreement. We want to sound like we stand for a shared future, but, in fact, we would quite like the tribalism to continue because it suits our politics." I will say to all parties in the House that they should be careful to play that game. Be careful to position yourself in a place that relies on everyone else being something else for you to be something. Be careful about undermining this institution and allowing an amendment to a motion, which anyone with a titter of wit knows is designed to prejudice and undermine the work of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I agree with his point that we do not have to follow GB for the sake of doing so, but, if the GB system, whereby all political donations above a certain level are published, is more democratic, does the Social Democratic and Labour Party not agree that that is a good idea?

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Agnew for his intervention. I will happily deal with the disclosure of donations. The SDLP's submission to the Northern Ireland Office consultation

on this matter is absolutely clear: we do not oppose the disclosure of donations.

2.15 pm

However, we also live in Northern Ireland, and in Northern Ireland today there is extortion. It is taking place not necessarily in those constituencies where Mr Dickson may have some electoral presence but in others. It is a sad reality of where we are.

Let us remember that mortar bombs were seized last night on the way to attacking a police station. This, I wish I could say, is a stable democracy where we can abandon all the architecture of the Good Friday Agreement and live in some sort of democratic nirvana. However, the evidence suggests that it is not. The evidence suggests that we have a huge amount of work to do to eradicate violence, the threat of violence and a culture of coercion from our society. The evidence suggests —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: I will not, Mr Dickson, because I have given way once already.

The evidence suggests that we have a lot more investment to make in upholding the institutions and true values of the Good Friday Agreement. Frankly, everyone in the House who is in office must —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr McDevitt: — remember, acknowledge and honour the fact that they are in office only because of the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Weir: I support the motion and oppose the amendment. Perhaps I could start with some of the remarks that the Member who spoke previously made. I find myself disagreeing with him on one point and probably agreeing with him on another.

If the motion were a clear attempt to undermine the AERC's work, we would not be supporting it. However, I think that it stands on its own merits. The motion refers to legislation that is potentially going through Westminster. I think that it is right that we comment on that. That does not undermine the good work that the AERC has to do. Indeed, the motion identifies a number of issues that the AERC will, I think, need to tackle.

I agree with the Member who spoke previously on the import of the amendment. It is clear that the amendment looks towards an idealised world that I am sure that we would all like to embrace. However, we have to deal with Northern Ireland as it is today. It is undoubtedly the case that elected representatives from across the Chamber and, indeed, others, have been subject to various attacks, intimidation and extortions. What confidence could we have in this society that full disclosure of political donations would not at least create the perception or, indeed, very real fear among a lot of people that they could be targeted by extremists, or, at the very least, that a businessperson making a donation to one party would then suffer a backlash or be boycotted?

The alternative is that, unless we see donations dealt with in a proper manner through normal procedures, we will be left back in a situation where we are depending more and more on the state to pay political parties. I think that that is something that —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly.

Mr Dickson: That amuses me. I and my party have been subjected to abuse and intimidation over the past few months, yet I am standing here four-square supporting the open declaration of political donations. There is international terrorism in the rest of the United Kingdom. There are people from different backgrounds and communities right across England, Scotland and Wales who make donations to political parties and who will have people from their communities oppose what they do. The argument simply does not wash.

Mr Weir: I am glad that, if I have achieved at least one thing in this debate, I have amused Mr Dickson. The reality is that you cannot put the situation in Northern Ireland on a par with what happens across the water. The idea that parties there may be subject to international terrorism does not relate to what happens here. If we are talking about people being under threat, people from across the Chamber have been under threat from different sources for decades. That is nothing new, and that threat persists.

If the Member said that he was amused, I was somewhat amused by the reference by one of the Members on the opposite Benches that Sinn Féin declared that it is now in favour of complete transparency. That would be a very welcome development in this debate. Although it may or may not be in favour of complete transparency when it comes to donations, it seems to have a complete lack of transparency when it comes to anything to do with its past. A veil of amnesia comes down when anything is mentioned about past or current involvement in any activity. We need only look at the denials of some of the leaders of Sinn Féin, who must have been on holiday for the past 40 years, because they appear to have had no level of involvement whatsoever.

One of the key parts of the motion urges people to play a full role at Westminster. Criticism has been made of the joint unionist candidate in Mid Ulster. Along with others in the Chamber, I am proud to support that candidate. The reality is that that candidate is offering something else, which his main alternative cannot. He is offering representation at Westminster. I hope that he is elected. If he is not elected, I hope that the Members opposite will have a change of heart and that their Members will take —

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No, I have given way already. If people are not doing their job, they should not be getting paid or getting allowances for it. Indeed, it is something that was raised by the Conservative Government in the past. I believe that it is something that should be carried through in this legislation. There is no doubt that the party opposite is very up front in its policy of abstention, but it should suffer the consequences of that. It should not be getting allowances for not doing its job, as would be the case if any one of us was boycotting this House.

The motion contains a range of other issues. Obviously, there is reference to a formal opposition. At present, there is the opportunity for anybody to be part of the opposition. If it would be helpful to have that in a more formalised or funded way, or in a more structured way for debates,

I would not have a particular problem with it. That is a matter that clearly needs to be discussed.

The number of Departments and the size of the Assembly are going to be issues for debate. From a financial point of view, a lot of people out there are suffering because of the austerity that has to be there. It is right that we look at our systems of government and ensure that we are providing the best value for money. We should look at the number of Departments, for example, and ask, "Can we deliver this in a better way?" If people are suffering on the ground, they want at least some of that pain to be shared all around. The House cannot be immune to that. Nor can we be so ossified in our views about our structures that 1998 can become some form of holy writ that cannot be changed.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member will draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Weir: As such, I have no problem, and I am happy to support the motion but oppose the amendment.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Táimid i gcoinne an rúin agus an leasaithe. We are opposed to the motion and the amendment, as Pat Sheehan has already indicated.

Some would prefer to pretend that they do not support the Good Friday Agreement, but it is a very carefully crafted agreement, with its checks and balances to ensure maximum representation. It is important for people to look at the majority of constituencies in the North as currently represented, because they will see that we have representatives from a number of political parties.

The agreement also enshrines equality, mutual respect and parity of esteem. I listened to Paul Givan wax lyrical about how DUP Members are not for majority rule and how somehow they want to support equality. However, we just have to look at the way in which they abused power in the Assembly Commission in a desperate attempt during the recent flag debacle. Therefore, I am interested to see what the Members opposite can do to reassure people from the nationalist/republican community about how they would ensure equality, given the sad record over the past number of years, particularly prior to 1998, in this Building, when it was a very, very cold house for nationalists and republicans.

In any arrangements that we have, Sinn Féin wants to see maximum equality, maximum parity of esteem and fair play, not only for nationalists, unionists and republicans but for people from ethnic minorities and the new communities that have come to this part of Ireland.

I move now to political donations. I think that it is hilarious. We have Mike Nesbitt jumping up and down waxing lyrically about transparency, good governance and all the rest, yet it is obvious that he is not in favour of transparency when it comes to donations. Sinn Féin is not afraid of maximum transparency. We welcome it. It leads to good governance and to people understanding who the funders of parties are and why they might be funding them.

I note Mike Nesbitt's and, indeed, Paul Givan's comments. What we have heard are excuses. I also noted Conall McDevitt's comments. I am also a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. Conall McDevitt is for transparency, yet he is using the excuse of security for not having transparency. Yes; there are issues with security. However, Stewart Dickson made a very valid point, which I will share. Members of my party, including me, have had threats. Members of his party have had threats. Yet, we are not afraid of transparency. We are not afraid to lead.

I am disappointed. Although I support the principle — I suppose, the spirit — of Stewart's amendment, I agree with points that were made by Conall McDevitt: it could have been crafted better. Had it been, my party would have supported it because we absolutely support transparency on political donations. I ask the Member to take that away for future amendments.

On dual mandates, I note that Mike Nesbitt did not take up Pat Sheehan's challenge. In fact, I remember when, in a previous Executive, a Bill was going through, and his party's two Ministers had to leave the Executive due to a conflict of interest. They were Ministers, MLAs and councillors. It is the same with the party opposite; there were Ministers who were MLAs and councillors. It was the same with the SDLP. That is nothing short of ludicrous. Those parties do not even have an abstentionist policy. How could those Members be expected to be at Westminster, Stormont and local councils? Well, the attendance record speaks for itself.

Sinn Féin has made no secret of its abstentionist policy. Just look at the party's history since its foundation. Since 1905, all party members who have been elected to Westminster have been elected on an abstentionist ticket. Our electorate know and understand that. They continue to vote for us. We do not agree with British interference in Ireland. We believe that there should be a united Ireland. We are actively working towards that and make no secret of the fact.

Peter Weir went on about the past. I have yet to hear from his party a critique of the state forces and what they did in the past, which included collusion, the shoot-to-kill policy and torture.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring her remarks to a close.

Ms Ruane: Sinn Féin has said, yes, let us deal with the past.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Ruane: Let us deal with it comprehensively.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mr Raymond McCartney.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 8, 9, 10 and 11 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust: Grafton Recruitment

1. **Ms Fearon** asked the Minister of Justice whether any members of the board of directors of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust have been involved, on behalf of the PSNI, in contractual negotiations, tender evaluations and/or approval of contracts with Grafton Recruitment for the provision of agency, consultancy and associate staff. *(AQO 3515/11-15)*

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The PSNI director of human resources joined the board of directors of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) in 2002 as the PSNI's representative. He was involved in the tender evaluation processes in 2002 and 2008 for the award of contracts to Grafton Recruitment for the provision of agency, consultancy and associate staff to the PSNI.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat. As the Minister knows, the PSNI recently awarded a contract to Grafton worth £20 million without open competition. Does he agree that the 'Managing Public Money' (MPM) guidelines raise serious questions about the role of a public servant in awarding contracts if they are a member of another organisation that has a relationship with that contractor? Can he confirm that the involvement of the trust in arranging training for retired police officers to be rehired is not what it is publicly funded to do by his Department?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms Fearon for that supplementary question. The reality is that there are two different issues. The first one is the issue that has been explored by the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). We are waiting to see the final report on the operation of the PSNI in relation to the recruitment of agency staff. The second one is the PRRT issue, and nothing that I have seen suggests that PRRT has behaved inappropriately in the way it has managed its business.

Mr McDevitt: Maybe I will press the Minister a little bit on this issue. In the Minister's opinion, is it a conflict of interest if a senior official of a procuring authority is party to the decisions to procure services from another organisation in which he has a directorial role?

Mr Ford: No, I do not believe that there is a conflict of interest in the way that has been outlined. It is obviously for the individual directors of PRRT to note the issues as to whether there is a conflict of interest as they perceive their operation. In the context where the individual concerned is specifically there as a representative of the PSNI and has no direct personal financial interest, that clearly is not what would normally be regarded as a conflict of interest.

Mr Swann: In regard to the contract negotiations, can the Minister outline whether the contracts through Grafton for agency staff in the PSNI attract the same pay scale as those for regular police officers?

Mr Ford: The issue of pay scales is entirely between Grafton and its employees. On that basis, I, as Minister, do not have any information.

Burglaries: Foyle

2. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Justice how many burglaries there have been in the Foyle constituency area over the past two years. *(AQO 3516/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Statistics on recorded crime are maintained by the PSNI. I am advised by the PSNI that there were 308 domestic burglaries in the Foyle policing area in 2011 and 405 in 2012. For burglaries in buildings other than dwellings, the figures were 208 in 2011 and 208 in 2012. The PSNI has advised that the in-year figures for 2012 are provisional and may be revised.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. In the Chamber earlier today, many other Members and I praised the work of the police in Foyle in foiling an attempt on life last night. Will the Minister assure the House that police and community police in Foyle are adequately resourced to tackle day-to-day crimes such as burglary?

Mr Ford: The Chief Constable assures me that he has adequate resources to deal with his day-to-day policing pressures. Clearly, there are issues, and we have highlighted those in the Chamber many times. There are particular issues relating to Derry as the City of Culture and, as we sadly noted earlier this morning, there are specific issues relating to terrorist activity in Derry. However, the Chief Constable has assured me that he has adequate resources. It should be noted that things such as domestic burglary are continuing to decline significantly across Northern Ireland generally. However, in individual districts, there are the inevitable upward or downward blips year on year.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that if a focused team were in place in any constituency to deal with burglaries, the detection rate would be higher and the instances of burglaries would decrease?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree that Ms McLaughlin has a point in that regard. That is why a campaign relating to domestic burglary issues is being undertaken in Derry. There are issues that also come across to the policing and community safety partnership (PCSP). There is one major problem in that Derry has a difficulty that does not apply to other places: there is a very high rate of creeper burglaries because people simply do not lock doors and windows. Sadly, these days, particularly in urban areas, people cannot afford to be as trusting as that. That is one of the issues that has been highlighted most recently by the police there.

Mrs Overend: I recently held a farm crime watch and safety awareness day in my constituency office. Do the burglary figures include the theft of trailers and suchlike from farms? Will the Minister outline the strategies that are in place to reduce the number not only in the Foyle constituency but across Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I am not sure how many questions there were. In answer to the first one, burglary is theft from within

premises. Unless Mrs Overend has constituents who store their tractors inside a dwelling house, they would not be covered by such figures. A very significant campaign is going on that involves police and PCSPs in different parts of Northern Ireland that shows a significant and welcome year-on-year reduction. The issue is about ensuring that local figures, through the operation of the PCSPs, are seen to be driven down by addressing the local needs that members of PCSPs see in conjunction with the police and the other relevant agencies.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

3. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on progress on implementing the policing and community safety partnerships, including whether a review will take place to ensure that they are working effectively. *(AQO 3517/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Policing and community safety partnerships are taking forward initiatives that aim to make a real difference on the ground and empower local people to shape local solutions to policing and community safety issues. The Assembly recently approved an order designating a range of statutory bodies as members of all PCSPs. That order has now come into operation. The contribution that those organisations can make to enhancing community safety has now been formally recognised, and I look forward to seeing the further benefits that the partnerships can achieve through the strengthening of existing joint working.

The partnerships are planning for the future, taking forward the development of two-year partnership plans that will address issues identified through targeted consultation with local communities. The PCSP joint committee, which is my Department and the Policing Board working together, will continue to monitor their effectiveness on an ongoing basis, assessing partnership plans and tracking achievement against those on a quarterly basis to ensure that they address locally identified concerns.

The joint committee will, as part of that ongoing process, scope out a range of issues for review. The work of the joint committee will be complemented by a planned review of the general effectiveness of PCSPs by the Criminal Justice Inspection. The joint committee will also consider the outcomes and take any necessary action to ensure that the partnerships continue to deliver effectively for their communities.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he outline the role of his Department to intervene should a PCSP not be functioning effectively, particularly when some members of one political party seek to impede progress?

Mr Ford: I suspect that Mr Moutray is hinting at a particular issue. If he wishes to raise that issue in correspondence with me, I will happily respond. The key issue is the role of the joint committee of the board and the Department to assess the work that is being done against the partnership plans and to ensure that those plans are in place and that action is being taken. That is the best way to address the issues raised and to ensure that the PCSPs are operating effectively. It is, of course, early days, but I want to ensure that we maximise the opportunities from bringing together district policing partnerships (DPPs) and community safety partnerships (CSPs).

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Will the Minister comment on the issue of voting rights on PCSPs and whether it is appropriate for designated agencies, such as the PSNI and the Housing Executive, to have a vote, taking into account that they are accountable for delivery on the partnerships?

Mr Ford: Mr Sheehan raises an interesting point, and how exactly that will operate is being considered by my officials and the Policing Board. In the meantime, I am sure that most Members will be aware that the statutory bodies are not exercising their rights in the first year of operation. That is one of the matters that will be considered as we review the working of the partnerships.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I must be very careful not to get my Ps and S's mixed up in my question. Since the establishment of the PCS —

Some Members: PCSPs

Mr McCarthy: No. The PCSPSs. Will the Minister remind us of the intended benefits of those organisations over the previous and separate DP and CSPs, if he can understand all those PS's, PQs and what have you?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Minister will do his best to understand.

Mr Ford: I am sure that my colleague meant to say DPPs and CSPs. If it is any consolation, people in the Department have also been known to trip over those letters.

As a local representative, I am not unique in having identified problems previously when very similar groups of people attended two different meetings a month in each district, one for the former community safety partnership and one for the former district policing partnership. Certainly, the accountability issue that was relevant to the police and administered through the DPPs remains, I believe, relevant so that the other agencies live up to their responsibilities in promoting community safety. That is why I welcome the fact that we were able to get the agreement of the House on the first Justice Bill that established the PCSPs, and the Act is now in operation. That ensures a much more holistic and joined-up way of working. It also ensures that the full range of organisations responsible for matters relating to community safety will now work together.

There have been some very good examples of work being done in PCSPs. However, it is important that all the relevant agencies play their part in every partnership.

Prison Review: Update Reports

Mr D Bradley: Ceist uimhir a ceathair, a LeasCheann Comhairle.

4. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice when he intends to publish the update reports by the oversight team on the implementation of the prison review. *(AQO 3518/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Further —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, will the Member translate?

Mr Ford: The Minister can translate "question 4", Deputy Speaker.

Further to my response to a question asked in the House —

2.45 pm

A Member: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We do not take points of order during Question Time. To keep everyone calm, will the Member please translate?

Mr D Bradley: Sure, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Minister was correct. Question 4.

Mr Ford: Further to my response to a question asked in the House on 5 February, I am pleased to confirm that the four reports from the prison review oversight group have been provided to the Justice Committee, and a copy of each has been placed in the Assembly Library. The oversight group is also preparing its first annual report. That will be presented to the Justice Committee in May and will also be deposited in the Library. In recognition of the level of external interest in the reform programme, the four reports to date have also been published on the Northern Ireland Prison Service's website. Plans are also being developed to publish a stakeholder report in June that will outline progress to date and the next steps that will be taken to reform our prisons.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ceist uimhir a ceithre a fhreagairt. Ba mhaith liom fiafraí de: cad é atá á dhéanamh aige le luas na n-athruithe a mhéadú?. I thank the Minister for answering question 4. What is the Minister doing to increase the speed of reform?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Bradley for the question, although I suspect that it could have been asked on a number of occasions. Undoubtedly, aspects of the reform programme did not proceed as quickly as we might have hoped — for example, the necessary means to appoint the members of the change management team took rather longer than we had hoped— but there has been a significant speeding up of the reform programme in recent months.

We have now reached the point that four of the recommendations from the review team have been signed off by the oversight group, and a fifth recommendation will go to the oversight group for approval this month. In addition to those five points specifically covered, considerable progress has been made on staffing matters. As the House will know, I will report on the outcome of the estates review later this month, and work is ongoing to transform Hydebank Wood into a secure college. Those are all indications of a significant speeding up of the work. Although getting work off the ground may have been a little bit slower than we had hoped, progress is now extremely good.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. Cuirim fáilte roimh an fhoireann seo agus a cuid oibre. I welcome the oversight team and its work. Will the Minister agree that the absence of an implementation plan undermines any process of accountability and any clear definition of what change is required?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot agree with Ms McCorley. I believe that we have a very firm, clear programme in the efficiency and effectiveness programme, which is underpinning the review team's work. Within that, there are a number of different work strands that spell out in great detail the work that is to be done. The fact that the oversight team is looking in detail at how each of those targets is met on a quarterly basis is an indication that we have a firm commitment to carry through on that reform process.

Mr Gardiner: Does the Minister accept that although accepting change is necessary, there are significant changes in losing too many prison staff within a short timescale?

Mr Ford: Mr Gardiner certainly has a point about that. That is why there has been a slight difficulty with some prison staff who would have hoped to leave earlier than has been possible. Staff are not being released without it being acceptable on operational grounds that they are able to be released. I am, however, glad to confirm that we have now received an approval from the Department of Finance that will allow all those who applied under the exit scheme to leave. There was a grant of funding that will enable a number — some 80 — to leave by the end of this month, and others will then leave as operational circumstances permit and new recruits come in. So, yes, there is an issue about the loss of experienced staff, but there is also an issue of their being replaced by well-qualified, enthusiastic, well-trained new staff. I believe that the Prison Service will be better for it and that those who served in difficult times will be able to get the early retirement that they deserve.

Hate Crime

5. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the development of the action plan to address the recommendations arising out of the Challenge Hate Crime project. *(AQO 3519/11-15)*

Mr Ford: My Department, in conjunction with NIACRO, will shortly publish a number of documents detailing the findings of the Challenge Hate Crime project and research. Following the publication of those reports, I will convene a meeting of all stakeholders to consider how best to take forward the recommendations. At the Challenge Hate Crime conference in September 2012, I announced that an action plan would be developed in response to the range of issues raised by the Institute for Conflict Research's report on hate crime and the justice system. Similar issues have been highlighted in the January 2013 report by the Northern Ireland Council on Ethnic Minorities on race and the criminal justice system. I also note that the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is conducting an investigation into how justice agencies manage race hate crime. In particular, a major problem that was highlighted for the Prison Service during the project was the identification of offenders who were convicted of offences aggravated by hostility under the terms of the Criminal Justice (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. Work is ongoing to introduce changes to facilitate better monitoring of the legislation and to identify offenders more effectively. Those changes are due to be introduced in the coming months, and they will be reviewed to ensure that the legislation is used effectively.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer and for that update on some of the progress that he outlined. Given that many members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community find themselves victims of hate crime, can the Minister tell me whether he is doing

any work with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to ensure that the long-overdue sexual orientation strategy is finally published?

Mr Ford: I certainly share the sentiment of Mr Eastwood's question, although I am afraid that the sexual orientation strategy is entirely a matter for OFMDFM. I am certainly concerned to ensure that, when we look at hate crime, we look at all aspects of it and not just at the more usual aspects of sectarianism and racism. The Department is committed to ensuring that we cover all aspects of hate crime as we look to the future.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Thank you for your answers so far. Does the Minister agree that, too often, tackling hate crime is undermined because we have no legislative definition of sectarianism in relation to hate crime?

Mr Ford: Ms McGahan raises an interesting issue about the difficulty of ensuring that we get the necessary acceptance of aggravation of hate crime. I am not sure, however, that the definition of sectarianism, as opposed to the proving of sectarianism, racism, homophobia or whatever, has been the difficult issue that has to be crossed. I certainly regret the fact that we were unable to reach that agreement when we discussed the issue in connection with sport while the Justice Bill was being debated in the Assembly's previous mandate.

Maghaberry Prison: Separated Prisoners

6. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice, given that Roe House is now full, where he intends to hold prisoners who have signed the separation compact in Maghaberry. *(AQO 3520/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Applications from prisoners to be admitted to separated accommodation are considered by the Prison Service on behalf of the Secretary of State. I have no role to play in the consideration of such applications, and I am, therefore, neither consulted on nor informed about the grounds for approving or refusing individual applications.

Affiliated republican prisoners who apply for and meet the criteria for separation are held on two designated landings in Roe House. The Prison Service has to manage accommodation pressures daily and, therefore, needs to retain a degree of flexibility in where it houses the various categories of prisoners in its custody. There are currently accommodation pressures across Maghaberry prison, so every effort is made to maximise the transfer of prisoners to Magilligan prison. I am aware that a small number of potentially separated republican prisoners are currently held in normal accommodation at Maghaberry. However, I am satisfied that the Prison Service keeps prisoner accommodation arrangements under review.

Mrs D Kelly: The Minister mentioned Magilligan prison in his answer. What progress is there on a new prison? Since prisoners' families should not also suffer a sentence, does he have some level of empathy with the concern of such families about where prisoners are housed and the impact of that on travel time?

Mr Ford: I am well aware, as is the Prison Service, of the remoteness of Magilligan. Nonetheless, in the current circumstances and given the accommodation pressures, a number of prisoners have to be accommodated at Magilligan whose families do not necessarily live close to it. However, I do not imagine that the House would wish me to entirely pre-empt the statement that I will make on the prison estate in a couple of weeks' time, when we will be able to look at the issue in a bit more detail.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Does the Minister agree that the prison review team's recommendation to categorise Maghaberry into four mini-prisons provides the best way forward for dealing with any accommodation issues related to Roe House?

Mr Ford: Mrs Kelly would be annoyed were I to answer that supplementary after declining to answer hers, other than to say that we will know in a couple of weeks' time when I discuss the prison estate strategy in the House.

Mr Givan: The Minister knows that there are more than 1,000 prisoners in Maghaberry, which is already struggling with capacity issues, and that hundreds of prisoners are already doubled up in cells. However, the demand on the republican side is to try to take the other landings in Roe House. Will he assure this place that he will resist those attempts by prisoners who continue to demand special status for the things that they have done, when they should be regarded in the same way as every other prisoner, and that is as a criminal.

Mr Ford: I refer Mr Givan to my initial comments: it is not for me either to resist or to support demands for separated accommodation. He may wish to raise those issues with the Secretary of State. I will ensure that the accommodation pressures are managed as best they can be in the interests of all prisoners, and that includes the wide variety of categories of prisoners currently accommodated in Maghaberry.

Prisons: Body Scanners

7. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the outcome of the three-month testing of the new search technology at Magilligan prison and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre. *(AQO 3521/11-15)*

Mr Ford: It is important to state that the objective of the process of technological evaluation was to establish whether a viable solution was available that would serve to reduce the level of intrusion inherent in our existing procedures. From the start, I was clear that any solution must, as a minimum, perform at least as well as our current processes and that the security and safety of all in our prisons was and remains paramount. Following an evaluation of the millimetre wave scanners at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood, the Prison Service found that there were limitations to the technology in the operational environment. There was a reliance on the compliance of the prisoner to be scanned, and current full-searching processes provided a higher level of security and, therefore, greater assurance.

It is important to remember that millimetre wave body scanners use technology that is primarily designed for the aviation industry. That use is different from that in our prisons. Such technology is not in use in any prison in the United Kingdom. I remain very grateful to the manufacturers for their help and support throughout the pilot. Although I share the Prison Service's disappointment at the outcome of the pilot, I am heartened by its

determination to continue to seek a modern, viable alternative to our existing practice of full-body searching. To that end, I have just received the Prison Service's justification application seeking permission to pilot the use of transmission X-ray technology. After consideration, I shall, as required by the legislation, register it with the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Finally, it is important to state that the requirement for full searching on entry to and exit from the prison and in some other circumstances must remain until a satisfactory alternative can be found.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he indicate whether there are any benefits for the Prison Service from the trials of those scanners, and will he outline what the likely costs were?

Mr Ford: The benefits were the benefits achieved by following through on the prison review team's report recommendation that we should seek an alternative to full body searching. That showed that the Prison Service was committed to following through on that, and I was fully supportive of those trials being carried through. However, as I highlighted, it showed that the technology developed for different circumstances was less than ideal in the Prison Service. Therefore, we are seeking to look at other methods of the kind that we have already suggested will be more appropriate for Maghaberry, although they might not have been needed for Magilligan or Hydebank Wood.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers. Will he ensure that whatever technological piece of equipment is brought to assist searches, as recommended in Anne Owers's report, it is not seen as a stand-alone measure but will complement other aspects of searching?

Mr Ford: Indeed, Mr McCartney makes a valid point. It is not simply a matter of a machine; it is a matter of the full aspects of ensuring security and safety of prisoners and prison staff. That is something that we will bear in mind as we continue to look at other options.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister state whether there were any objections to the use of that new technology from prisoners or their visitors?

Mr Ford: I can tell Mr Robinson that it only affected prisoners, not visitors. There were some objections, probably on the basis that people had to receive a full body search anyway and it was a matter of covering the two options at the same time. Some people, therefore, objected to it, but the key issue was that, unfortunately, the technology did not prove to have the same benefits as a full body search.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that questions 8, 9, 10 and 11 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Community Safety College

12. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the new Community Safety College at Desertcreat, including whether it is on target financially. *(AQO 3526/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The procurement process for the Community Safety College is still ongoing, and it is, therefore, inappropriate to comment at this time.

Mr Craig: I listened with interest to what the Minister had to say. *[Laughter.]* Can the Minister actually comment on any aspect of that project and whether the rumours that have been in the press about a 35% cost overrun are true?

Mr Ford: However inventive Mr Craig may be, as Minister I will comment on facts as and when appropriate, not on rumours.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Dr Alasdair McDonnell is not in his place to ask question 13. Mr Conall McDevitt is not in his place to ask question 14.

Criminal Justice: Payment by Results

15. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the potential for introducing payment by results schemes in the criminal justice sector. *(AQO 3529/11-15)*

Mr Ford: We continue to monitor developments in England and Wales, but it is much too early to make a meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of payment by result schemes in the criminal justice context. In addition, Northern Ireland is a much smaller potential market, so it is not clear yet whether such schemes would be feasible. I understand that that view is shared by the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice and the Irish Minister for Justice and Equality. We already achieve good outcomes in Northern Ireland as a result of our existing arrangements; for example, through the Probation Service working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Consequently, I am not considering the early introduction of payment by result schemes in Northern Ireland.

Environment

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Planning Bill: Rural Communities

1. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister of the Environment how his proposed Planning Bill will assist rural communities. *(AQO 3530/11-15)*

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank Lord Morrow for his question. The reason why the Planning Act was passed was to reconfigure and reshape the planning system.

What I am doing through the Planning Bill is accelerating the proposals and the law passed in the previous mandate to ensure that, as soon as possible and in advance of the rundown to RPA, planning is more fit for purpose. Whether it is for an urban community, a rural community or any other community in the North of Ireland, requirements for consultees to respond within a certain time frame, statutory pre-application discussion around significant applications and fixed penalty notices by way of enforcement will serve the interests of the urban and rural dweller.

3.00 pm

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his reply, but does he not agree that our countryside has been denuded to some degree by stringent rural planning objections? Does the Minister not accept that this was an ideal opportunity to make way for greater planning facilities in our rural countryside? I feel, and I hope that he agrees, that his Bill does not come up to expectations in that regard.

Mr Attwood: As I said, the purpose of my Bill is to bring into the life of planning in advance of RPA that which would otherwise come into life only at the time of or following RPA. I have no ambition greater than that, important though that ambition is.

In any case, I believe that what is now happening around planning policy statement 21 (PPS 21), which guides rural development, is reshaping our rural dispersed community in a helpful and sustainable way and one that is consistent with good planning and good environmental requirements. Let me give you an example: 83% of applications for rural dwellings, whether replacement or new dwellings, are now being approved. That demonstrates, especially now that there is new training in place, peer review and, indeed, appropriate ministerial review of planning applications where there may be some dispute. It demonstrates proper flexibility for rural dwellers when it comes to applications, which is consistent with good planning policy.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Minister, clearly PPS 21 does not facilitate non-farming rural dwellers. Will you outline what you will bring forward in the new Planning Bill to facilitate those non-farming rural dwellers?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated to Lord Morrow, that is not the purpose of the Bill. The purpose of the Bill is to accelerate reform of the planning system in advance of RPA. Otherwise, that would have been put off until 2015. How do we accommodate rural dwellers? That is done through the proper application of PPS 21. Members have told me in previous times how they thought that there is inconsistency in planning decisions between divisional planning offices when it came to PPS 21. We are saying that the policies that guide replacement and new dwellings in the rural countryside were not being applied in a proper and prudent manner. That is the advice that I was given, and it is why I conducted, and continue to conduct, an operational review of PPS 21.

Perhaps MLAs have just gone quiet, but I do not now get a lorry load of correspondence in respect of individual PPS 21 applications in which Members bring to my attention concerns about the difference between application in one area and another. I do not get that any more. The reason is that we conducted training in the autumn of 2011. There is peer review by senior management of cases where there is some contention. Heretofore, cases have been referred to me. The consequence of that is that, in the round, the application of the policy now fulfils the spirit and substance of the policy and is accommodating of the rural dweller when it comes to approval decisions.

Mrs D Kelly: Now that the Minister has outlined what the Bill is not about, perhaps he will give us an indication of some of the benefits of the Planning Bill.

Mr Attwood: As I indicated, there will be a requirement on developers to undertake pre-application discussions in respect of significant developments. Why will that be significant? With the Windsor Park application, because of the piloting of pre-application discussions, when the planning application was eventually lodged by the football authorities, it was processed in 11 weeks. That demonstrates, in pilot form, the benefit of pre-application discussions. That will become a statutory requirement on the far side of the Planning Bill, whereby any developer will have to give 12 weeks' notice as to their planning intentions and will have to submit a report along with the planning application on how they conducted local community consultation. That, allied with proposals for enforcement, consultation, timelines and statutory consultees, the list for which will be much broader than the current list, and other interventions will make the planning system more fit for purpose and will see it turn more corners. It has turned many corners over the past 18 months.

Planning: Renewable Energy

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the average length of time before a decision is issued on renewable energy planning applications. *(AQO 3531/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. It is an important question because, as I keep saying, renewables are arguably Ireland's biggest economic opportunity. That includes Northern Ireland because of the quality of our wind, wave and tidal energy and the quality of the manufacturing, R&D and services that we can provide to take forward renewables applications.

On average, it takes 37 weeks to process a renewables application, which is too long. However, when you look at the scale of renewables applications that have gone to the point of decision, especially in the past 18 months, compared with any time heretofore, that tells a much bigger and better story. In the two quarters up until September 2012, 326 renewables applications were approved, building on the 401 renewables applications approved in 2011-12 and far in excess of the numbers in previous years. The scale of renewables application approvals and decisions demonstrates how the planning system is increasingly shaping itself to live up to the ambition of renewables being our single biggest economic opportunity.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for his answer and note his commitment to renewables being the future. I am sure that he is aware of the 40% target for renewable electricity that the Executive have set. Is he aware that there are experts who believe that the first 20% will come at a cost of £80 million and that the second 20% will more likely cost in the region of £800 million? Is he content that consumers should foot the bill?

Mr Attwood: That is an important question because although we are on track to achieve our 40% renewable target by 2020, if all the wind developments that have been approved were built and the energy went to the national grid, that alone would account for 30% of electricity needs in the North. So we are on the right path.

The Member makes two valid points. First, if you have approvals but have not got connection, or if you have

approvals but the cost of connection is disproportionate, there will be a risk to the renewable target of 40% being achieved by 2020. To a large degree, that is outwith my authority because it is an issue between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the industry and the regulator. I note and welcome the progress in that regard recently.

Secondly, we are in a situation in the North in which, to borrow a phrase, we could reach a perfect storm. The Utility Regulator spoke about that at a recent conference in Belfast. There could be a perfect storm in that we might not have sufficient interconnection on the island of Ireland to keep the lights on in Northern Ireland. That is only one of the factors that could lead to a perfect storm. The issues of energy security, energy cost and, as the Member said, the cost of connection of renewables are ones on which we need to more collectively gather our thoughts.

Mr Spratt: Currently, wind turbine applicants appear to think that there is a considerable delay with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which is one of the consultees. Given that the agency is within the remit of the Minister and his Department, will he ensure that the process for many of these outstanding applications is speeded up?

Mr Attwood: If the Member and other Members were to speak to people in the renewable energy industry, they would tell you how the process now compares with any time heretofore, not least because of the scale of renewables applications in the system, which cover nine categories. The applications are not only for wind turbines and wind farms but anaerobic digesters, solar plants, and so on. There is a historical backlog, and there has been a surge of applications, especially for wind turbines, of which there are over 700 in the planning system at present. The fact that so many are now coming to the point of decision, especially in the past four quarters, demonstrates that the planning system is increasingly able to manage that scale of application. It is getting decisions out on renewable energy and to enable farm diversification because many applications come from farmers.

I note what the Member says, and there have been a number of conversations, to put it mildly, in the Department between those in planning, the NIEA and me. Those in the planning offices and strategic planning know that they are the executive authority and that they make the decisions. It is for them to take into account all material considerations and to accept or not accept the advice that they are given by the NIEA as one of those with whom they consult. They know that, and I have stressed that point. On the other hand, you cannot run a coach and horses through advice from the NIEA, especially on the habitats directives from Europe, where we have a height responsibility. I will not allow that to happen. At the same time, I will encourage the planning system, as the executive authority, to make the right decision based on the right grounds, whatever the other advice might be.

Ms Lo: Will the Minister consider encouraging renewable companies to include community benefits in their funding applications?

Mr Attwood: That is a very important and timely question. We have asked a third-party organisation to run a summit on community benefits because, in the round, whether the applications are for renewables, wind farms or other categories, the potential for community benefits is not sufficiently embedded in our planning system for us to see, within the granting of consent, benefits to the community from renewables or significant other applications. We have something to learn in that regard, especially from Scotland, but with the important caveat that there cannot be a sense that attaching a potential community benefit to a significant planning or renewables application is, in some way, a means of getting preferable treatment in the planning system. No applicant must think that. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about mainstreaming into the planning system benefits, to the community and the individual, of applications open to that sort of potential.

Chauffeur-driven Vehicles

3. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of the Environment what provision will be made for chauffeur-driven limousine type vehicles within the regulations arising from the Taxis Act (NI) 2008. *(AQO 3532/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I recently conducted a consultation on this matter because of the issue that the Member identifies. The consultation ended in January, and its conclusions will be brought to me shortly and then referred to the Committee. I conducted the consultation because, as was the point behind the question, those who provide chauffeur-type services might be treated differently under the Taxis Act regulation. I agree with the point. Consequently, and subject to full assessment of the consultation and to the Committee's views, it is my intention that, in 2014, when relevant regulations are tabled, those who provide chauffeur services and, indeed, other services, will not be subject to the full licensing regime that will be applicable to other forms of private hire. Therefore, those who offer booking in advance and who have a contract for a stated amount to provide chauffeur services will not, for example, have to display a roof sign.

3.15 pm

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive answer. Given that there has been a response from 75% of drivers on the regulations on taxis, does he see any particular need to address in the regulations that he is introducing that issue of full compliance?

Mr Attwood: No, I do not. The Member is quite right, and he is very up to date. The reason is that, to date, under the taxi-licensing regime that came into place in the autumn of last year, 76% of drivers have been captured, in that they have applied for a temporary licence or have received a full licence. Given the new regime and its requirements, if not its demands, a 76% compliance rate this early into a new regime is quite significant and quite high. We believe that, through other mechanisms, including audit of the licensed offices on a rolling basis and other mechanisms of encouragement and advice, more and more of those who are not within the system will be captured by it, particularly when licence holders go to get their PSV licence in April this year. That will not be in a way that will penalise people or cut down their commercial opportunities but in a way that will create a more open market with more certainty and better standards for people who use taxis.

Mrs McKevitt: Will the Minister outline any other significant concessions or exemptions in the reform of taxi regulations in the North?

Mr Attwood: There are already some exemptions for wedding and courtesy transport, and that will be no different going forward. As Mr McLaughlin's question indicates, that will be broadened. In any case, this is the Assembly's will through the Taxis Act, and we are now working through, in regulation, the implementation of that Taxis Act. I have done that in a way that, as best as possible, and without pleasing all the taxi drivers, has tried to protect the interests of all taxi drivers, especially the small. Although the regulations came into effect in September of last year, that is why there was a two-month window in which there was some flexibility in the new regime.

Even though the system is in place, by and large, a light touch enforcement policy is being adopted this time. However, that may escalate in the near future. We tried to reduce the amount of upfront costs, especially those for the small or individual operator. In those ways and in our management of the rolling-out of the further taxi legislation between now and the end of 2014, we will do that in a way that does not rush our fences but tries to reduce costs and that, at all times, brings about a situation where illegality is driven out of the business and standards and performance improve even beyond the significant improvements of recent times.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister agree to continue to receive representation from public hire taxi firms on the legislation?

Mr Attwood: As the Member may have indicated, I certainly do. Even last week, I sat down with representatives of the public hire taxi business. We had to adjourn that meeting because we ran out of time, so it is to be reconvened before Easter. Even those individuals, and those whom they represent, said that they did not dispute the fact that the legislation, in the round, is a good thing and that there needs to be more regulation and a changed regime when it comes to taxis generally in future. For them, it was all about the implementation and whether, in that implementation, public hire taxis were being squeezed to their disadvantage and to the advantage of private hire taxis. That is not the purpose of the legislation, as I indicated in previous answers. If weighty points are made by the public hire businesses, I will listen to them and, where I can, try to accommodate them. As long as they are weighty points.

Review of Public Administration: Transition Committees

5. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will take the fact that Lisburn represents 70% and Castlereagh 30% of the population into consideration when approving the make-up of the statutory transition committee for Lisburn/Castlereagh. *(AQO 3534/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I am sorry to disappoint the Member, but, as I indicated to Mr McLaughlin, this is an occasion on which I will have to say no. I do appreciate that, across the clusters, different amalgamations are happening and that, for Lisburn and Castlereagh, there is a disproportion between the population sizes. Some would argue that that should be reflected in the membership of the statutory transition committee (STC). In my view, subject to what I am going to say, it is better to continue with the model of having equal representation. That has worked satisfactorily to date. To revisit the numerical balance on an STC compared with that on a voluntary transition committee (VTC) is not the way to go. If I did it for Lisburn and Castlereagh, there are clearly arguments around numbers and other criteria that mean that I would have to do it elsewhere. Although I have variations in the total numbers of STCs and VTCs for local reasons, I do not believe that there is a fundamental reason to revisit the overall numerical balance.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his answer. I ask my supplementary question knowing full well that I have a member of Castlereagh Borough Council right beside me. Does the Minister not recognise that the make-up of the new council area of Lisburn, which is much larger, with 27 wards, and Castlereagh, with only 13, is different from the other 10 new council groupings and that the membership of the VTC should reflect that?

Mr Attwood: I just do not understand why anybody who is an MLA is still sitting on any council anywhere in the North. I have made every effort to try to ensure that that practice ends. In the fullness of time, it will end, as a clause in the —

Mr McCarthy: It is a long commitment.

Mr Attwood: I do not know about other people, but I think that MLAs have more than enough commitment in this place. I am looking around the room, including not too far away from me. You could draw conclusions from some of that.

Although I understand the point that there is a differential, others could make the same and different arguments. Go up, for example, to the cluster on the north coast, where four different councils are coming together. Your colleague is nodding in some agreement with me. You could argue that you need to fine-tune that to reflect the scale of population in each area. In my view, it is not a matter of whether it is the right balance or, according to the Member, otherwise. The issue is whether the councils that are coming together in clusters — whether that be two councils or four councils, or whatever the configuration — are going to have the leap of imagination and practice to realise that, on the far side of 2015, they will be a unitary council that will have to behave as a unitary council, rather than trying to seek to protect their own historical council interests. That is the key. In that regard, a number of council clusters have yet to reach that point of imagination, never mind the practice of operation, when it comes to merger.

Mr Lunn: Given the fact that the DUP controls both those councils, and given the ambitious spending plans that Castlereagh has at the moment, does the Minister agree that perhaps the Lisburn DUP does not trust the Castlereagh DUP?

Mr Attwood: I would like to make it very clear that I do not think that that is the motivation behind the Member's question.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo í mo cheist ar an Aire. What is the Minister's latest thinking on how the issue of rates disparity can be tackled as the councils begin to merge into their new clusters?

Mr Attwood: As the Member is aware, the Executive decided three weeks ago that there would be a package of up to £30 million for rate convergence in order to reduce the

burden, following reorganisation, on those councils where there is a significant differential when it comes to rates. That is led by DFP with support from DOE. When you collapse it down, we are looking at three models: support for individual ratepayers, support for council clusters, or differential rates for a period after RPA while convergence happens. The Executive, the Finance Minister and I have not settled on the final model, but at least the financial backing is there for it.

Review of Public Administration: Transition Committees

6. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of the Environment whether d'Hondt will be used for appointing political members to statutory transition committees. *(AQO 3535/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank Mr McCartney for his question. It will be the case, with the formation of the new councils, that, built into the law in the re-organisation Bill that I hope will come to the Assembly very soon, there will be a statutory requirement to have a model of proportionality when it comes to positions within and outside a council cluster. The model will be d'Hondt, Sainte-Laguë or single transferable vote (STV), with the default being d'Hondt, in order to ensure that, although you would like people to aspire to and have the ambition for power-sharing across the life of the council and external bodies, you need to have the certainty of legislation. Given that, heretofore, it was left to the voluntary transition committees to reflect the party membership, my understanding is that d'Hondt has prevailed in that regard. I do not intend to legislate by way of regulation to have d'Hondt or another mechanism as a requirement under the regulations when the statutory transition committees are formed.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer and his affirmation of proportionality. Will he give us an update on the consultation that has taken place with the councils on the formation of these new bodies?

Mr Attwood: There was a previous consultation in 2009 in that regard. It was my judgement to not have a fresh consultation but to conduct stakeholder events, and they have now concluded. On the basis of the conclusions of those stakeholder events, the regulations will come to the House in April. There was no formal consultation on the formation of the STCs — in my view, legally and operationally, that was not a requirement — but there was stakeholder engagement in order to ensure that there was under-standing and ownership of the proposals that have been taken forward, not least because the powers of the STC will be very important. As I have said in many places and I repeat now, the STCs will also have the power of appointment. In my view, the sooner the senior management of the new council cluster is confirmed by power of appointment granted to it by the STCs, the better all the clusters will be.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I understand that question 14 was reached during the questions to the Minister of Justice, and I was not in my place to ask that question. I apologise to you and colleagues in the House. It was entirely my own fault, and I am very sorry for not having been here to ask the question.

Private Members' Business

Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

> *That this Assembly notes the publication of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; supports the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates; welcomes the recognition within the Bill that political donations in Northern Ireland require sensitivity; acknowledges that further work is needed on measures that are still under consideration for potential inclusion in the Bill, including the creation of a formal Opposition in the Assembly, the size of the Assembly and the length of the Assembly term; and calls on all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster or to forfeit the expenses that they claim from Parliament. — [Mr Nesbitt.]*

Which amendment was:

Leave out from "welcomes" to "sensitivity" and substitute

"believes that the declaration and publication of donations to political parties in Northern Ireland should be handled in the same manner as donations to political parties in Great Britain". — [Mr Dickson.]

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt in éadan an rúin agus an leasaithe. I will speak against the motion and the amendment. The motion deals, in the main, with the Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, which the British Secretary of State said she was going to table in Westminster.

In all of those issues, we will be guided — as we have always been guided — by the core principles around equality, mutual respect and parity of esteem. We outlined that in our submission last week to the Select Committee, and we also outlined that, obviously as an Irish republican party, we are for the maximum transfer of powers, and we will seek to be in a position to legislate for those things ourselves in the future.

3.30 pm

I want to touch on a number of issues. Caitríona Ruane and Conall McDevitt made the point about the main bulk of the motion. Even the Select Committee realised, and last week it made it very clear, that large swathes of the Bill proposed by Owen Paterson will not now feature in the Bill as it goes forward, and quite rightly. We stated publicly at the time that Owen Paterson was, in a sense, encroaching on the work of the Assembly.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has a very clear remit. All the main parties in the Assembly are represented on the Committee. When issues that relate to the Assembly are discussed, the Chair has always made sure that some of the smaller parties outside the Committee that are not represented are given a status where they can come as observers or table questions to witnesses, and that is the way that it should be. Part of the motion tries to undermine the work of the Assembly. Perhaps there is the sense that the Ulster Unionists are real players when it comes to Westminster. I accept that

they have no MPs, but that is another day's work. On that basis, we oppose the proposal.

I come to the part of the motion where we are asked to note the publication of the draft miscellaneous provisions Bill, but at the end of the motion we are told that, if you are a party that supports inclusive and consensual politics, you have to take your seat at Westminster. That is a very upside-down version of democracy. Stewart Dickson, surprisingly, indulged himself in that a little bit. If you talk about a shared future and respecting people's views, you should respect the views of the electorate. We will see on Thursday of this week. Sinn Féin will, very clearly, state its view of abstentionism —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Dickson: I appreciate Mr McCartney's comments but, at the same time, if your party were to succeed in the election this week, a substantial minority of people in that constituency will have felt that their view will have been lost and that they will not have appropriate representation. What I am asking and suggesting to you is this: you have a duty of care to those who do not vote for you or those who actively vote against you, and that duty of care includes taking your seat in a democratic process, even though your party many not feel that that is the appropriate place for you to be.

Mr McCartney: You make that point. Your person will stand on that platform on Thursday, but bear this in mind: we have five Westminster MPs who offer a constituency service. I say on record that there are not too many people who have either come to us publicly, come to our constituency office or wrote to our MPs to say that we are not representing them and shown instances of where they have not been represented. People find different ways to represent their constituents, but when you have stated very clearly that you are not taking your seat, that is what you should do.

Even the defence that you used about the Welfare Reform Bill, when you said that people should be over there putting up a very good fight for it —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the Member to make his remarks through the Chair.

Mr McCartney: Sorry, Deputy Speaker. Through you, I remind Members that, collectively, the Westminster MPs who left here to defend us against the Welfare Reform Bill did not do a very good job of it. As a matter of fact, I have heard that some of them said this in their defence, "If only we were stronger. We are in a big House with 650 people, and we are overwhelmed". The Assembly is the place where that type of business should be conducted.

With regard to political donations, we were sympathetic with the shift in your amendment; I say that through the Chair. However, we think that the limit of £1,500 should be lowered. It should be £500. No one should fear finding out who gives a political donation. The public have a right to know, so that there is no sense of what went on in the past and, perhaps, still goes on, where people who give large political donations curry favour and can be rewarded. We have seen how that debacle has played out in Westminster and in other jurisdictions throughout Europe.

I note that the motion proposes that the Assembly support the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates. The best way to support anybody's commitment to do anything is to do what you feel is the tone or the input —

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

Mr McCartney: OK. Thank you.

Mrs D Kelly: I cannot help but be somewhat bemused by some of the contributions thus far. Mr McDevitt dealt adequately with the mixed messages that emanated from the Ulster Unionist Party. However, from a nationalist perspective, and from the position of being in a party that has always stood for equality and against violence, woe betide Sinn Féin to lecture others about equality given the recent judgements found against some of its most senior members.

Transparency is also an issue, given many Sinn Féin members stated dual membership of an organisation that extorted hundreds of thousands of pounds from the community that we all represent in the House. Nonetheless, the debate around the reform of the House should rightly be the business of the House. It demands the broadest support from the community in the North of Ireland, given that the institutions were roundly and overwhelmingly supported by the people of Ireland, North and South.

Our party made an extensive submission on the Bill, and, as you will know, Mr Deputy Speaker, members of Westminster's Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee were over here to take evidence from the political parties on the Bill. Indeed, as Mr McDevitt pointed out, the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is also considering the role of the House, particularly the issue of an opposition.

Our party has made an extensive response as to how the institutions here can be improved and reformed at some point in the future. At all times, the reforms that we could and would support demand protection for all minorities and are based on the premise of equality, protection and safeguards so that we do not go back to the types of majority rule that people in Northern Ireland experienced in the past.

I am happy for our party's submission at Westminster to be the critique of that Bill. I firmly support the party's submission, and I ask those who support the motion to read the SDLP's response to the proposed legislation if they have not already done so.

Mrs Overend: I am pleased to speak to the motion, which has been tabled in my name and in the names of my Ulster Unionist colleagues. The draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is vital legislation, especially for the future operation of the Assembly.

I was fortunate enough to spend some time on the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which considered a number of these issues in detail, and I am aware of the debate and, sometimes, differences of opinion between parties. However, the motion is important in allowing us to bring those issues to the Floor.

I believe that the Bill as it stands is not ambitious enough. However, two measures are to be particularly welcomed. First, the commitment to end dual mandates is a positive

development. Before my time in the House, Dawn Purvis attempted to legislate to end that through a private Member's Bill that was voted down. In that respect, it is better late than never. Some parties have been slower than others to end the practice of dual mandates. However, I believe that all are committed to that in the short to medium term, and we need to ensure that those commitments are carried through.

The issue of having consistency on this point across Scotland and Wales was raised. Uniformity across the UK is needed on people being a Member of any devolved Administration and a Member of Parliament at Westminster at the same time. I am also of the opinion that a TD should not be able to be a Member of the House of Commons. Perhaps an amendment will be made to ensure that this anomaly will be closed off.

The Bill recognises that the issue of political donations to parties in Northern Ireland needs to be looked at sensitively. This party, more than most, has had to deal with the effects of a terrorist campaign. We are, therefore, fully aware of the heavy price that some have paid for their political support.

Although time has moved on and we have relative peace, the fact is that the dissident threat remains severe. The very recent murder of a prison officer from my constituency was a terrible reminder of the capabilities of some of these groups. Therefore, I fully support the continued anonymity of political donors in Northern Ireland and reject the amendment from the Alliance Party. However, in doing so, I recognise that moving towards full transparency is necessary, but that cannot be at the expense of individual security.

The Member for South Down Ms Ruane waxes lyrical about transparency on expenses, yet denies the people of Northern Ireland transparency on the past deeds of high-profile members of her party in the terrorist campaign.

The concluding part of our motion deals with the Sinn Féin practice of claiming expenses while not taking their seats at Westminster. This important issue should be included in the measures still under consideration for potential inclusion in the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. It has been the long-standing policy of the Ulster Unionist Party to be against that position, and I will outline the reasons for that.

First, and most importantly, the people in the constituencies where Sinn Féin MPs are elected have no voice at Westminster on critical issues such as defence and financial services. I know that only too well from my constituency of Mid Ulster.

Secondly, if MPs do not take up their seat at Westminster and participate fully in proceedings there, why should their party be entitled to the expenses that Sinn Féin draws down? The Members on the Benches opposite spoke of how successful Sinn Féin is at representing their constituencies at Westminster. When I ask my neighbours from Mid Ulster whether they feel represented in that place, the answer is a resounding no.

My constituents may be rightly sceptical about Sinn Féin's decision to step down its double-jobbing representative in Mid Ulster, if only to boost its party's expenses intake. We are not talking about insignificant amounts but hundreds of thousands of pounds at taxpayers' expense for second homes in London, staff costs, administration and expenditure allowances. My colleague and party leader, Mike Nesbitt, referred to Sinn Féin claims of almost £700,000 last year.

The debate is also a timely reminder of the flawed position of Sinn Féin in the lead-up to the Mid Ulster by-election, where I hope that the people of my constituency will, in Nigel Lutton, elect an MP who will actually represent them —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mrs Overend: — as opposed to simply claiming the expenses.

I reiterate the importance of the Bill and urge all parties to support the motion.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Nesbitt, in his opening address, said that the Good Friday Agreement was a transitional agreement and that we therefore had to look at the current situation within that context. I reject that absolutely. The Good Friday Agreement is not a transitional agreement. It is an agreement that was endorsed by the majority of people in Northern Ireland and the Republic. There was, therefore, a concurrent majority North and South, and the people who voted for that agreement were voting, very clearly, for a partnership arrangement within Northern Ireland, a partnership arrangement between North and South, and a partnership arrangement between Ireland and Britain.

3.45 pm

Mrs Overend: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Agnew: There are two us.

Mr A Maginness: I will give way to Mrs Overend.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Member for giving way. You talk about the Ulster Unionists speaking about this as a transition. Surely, it has been a line from the opposite Benches that the Belfast Agreement is a transition to a united Ireland. Therefore, our line is surely equally viable.

Mr A Maginness: First of all, that is not the position that the SDLP has ever represented. We have said that we establish a partnership within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between Britain and Ireland as a whole. Through that, we create a situation where we can achieve the conditions in which reconciliation takes place within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between Ireland and Britain. We have seen that, Mr Deputy Speaker, in that we have seen the reconciliation take place between Ireland and Britain. We have seen the Queen's visit, we have seen the manifestations of reconciliation, and we have a seen a more equal relationship develop between Ireland and Britain. Indeed, that should serve as a model of achieving that within Northern Ireland and between North and South.

If we start unpicking the agreement, as Mr Nesbitt suggested — *[Interruption.]* He may shake his head, but, in fact, that is what he is going to do. If he pursues the line that it is a transitional agreement, he in fact he starts picking away at it.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will give way, certainly, because I want to hear the point.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. It is a transitional set of arrangements. The next step to solidifying it and to moving towards normal politics is the introduction of opposition. Was it not Mr Durkan, when referring to the agreement, who talked about it being a process rather than a product?

Mr A Maginness: The agreement is a process — of course it is a process. It is a process of building partnership. That is why we should be building partnership within the Chamber, why we should be building partnership within the Executive and why we should be building partnership in the community. That is the way in which we will change the nature of our politics here and bring about reconciliation. That is the aim of the Good Friday Agreement, and that should be the aim of all of us. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind Members that the correct way to make your remarks is through the Chair.

Mr A Maginness: It should be the aim of all of us, Mr Deputy Speaker, to try to achieve that reconciliation. Out of that reconciliation, we will look at a new society and a new politics, which will be creative and which will transform relationships not only in Northern Ireland but between North and South. It will also increase further the relationship changes between Britain and Ireland. That is the nature of the agreement. If you go messing about with the agreement, as you suggested, in terms that it is simply a —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. As I reminded Members, you make your remarks through the Chair, not in the second person.

Mr A Maginness: Certainly, Mr Deputy Speaker. Of course, I am addressing the whole House, and I am addressing your good self in particular, and, as your good self would understand, I use a few rhetorical flourishes to emphasise the point.

I think that it is necessary to remind people, first, of the mandate of the agreement from all the people of Ireland, and, secondly, that the agreement has a specific purpose, which is to achieve reconciliation. We must, therefore, deepen partnership to achieve that reconciliation. I do not see that reflected in the motion that the Ulster Unionists tabled today, nor do I see it in the leadership that the leader of the Ulster Unionists, Mr Nesbitt, has given his party. He had never mentioned the agreement, until today. It is something that may or may not have happened.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr A Maginness: However, he should emphasise the very emphasis and centrality of the agreement —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr A Maginness: — if he wishes to give progressive leadership.

Mr Allister: Mr Deputy Speaker, you can relax now after that rule-bending speech by the Member from the SDLP. You know that I would not dare to do anything at all that approaches bending the rules of the House.

The draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill is most notable for what it does not contain. Last week, I spoke to a politics class in one of our post-primary schools. *[Interruption.]* Yes, I do not know quite what the pupils had done to deserve it. However, there you are. I asked them to name two or three key things that denote a working democracy. It was no surprise to me that they said the right to free and fair elections; the right to change your Government; and the right to have an opposition. However, in respect of two of those — the right to change your Government, and, thereby, to vote a party out of Government, and the right to have an opposition — we have constructed, in the House, the very antithesis of that, causing me, in another place, to describe this House as a blot on the democratic landscape, and so it is. It functions by denying the very right of an opposition to exist and by telling Northern Ireland's voters, "Oh yes, you can vote, but you can never change your Government" and, "Oh yes, you can tinker with the pecking order in government, but you cannot vote a party out of government if it retains a handful of MLAs." That is not democracy: that is built on the very antithesis of democracy. It is little wonder that there is such a growing disconnect between the House and people, as has been demonstrated in so many ways, including by the falling turnout at elections.

Of course, when they were spinning and selling the St Andrews Agreement, some people told us — the some being those on the nearly empty DUP Benches — that by 2015, there was bound to be a review; that we would have to put up with it for only eight years, after which there would be voluntary coalition and an opposition; and that it was a small price to ask for a short time. Everyone knows, as I knew and said then, that it was a con. If the Secretary of State thinks that the House will self-regulate into a functioning democratic institution, she is even more deluded that I thought. The House will never address the issues that most in the House live off. There is not one politician in the Executive who is prepared to jettison the guarantee that, as of right, his or her party is for ever in government. Therefore, the House will never self-regulate.

Last year, there was a simple illustration of that in the Committee on Procedures. I made a most modest proposal in that Committee that the growing ranks of the unattached in the House — *[Laughter.]* — should have the rights that exist in other parliamentary institutions for a group — a technical group — of non-attached members so that, perish the thought, they could have representation on the Business Committee. We might just arrive at a situation in which we challenge the fact that only Executive parties are represented on the Business Committee and get to the point at which someone who is not in an Executive party just might get called and have the right to table an Adjournment topic or have a motion taken — something that never happens in the House. Who voted down that most basic, fundamental, starting-point proposition of a technical group? It was the cabal of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Allister for giving way. Perhaps the Members on those Benches would consider a same-sex union of some form. That would be a way of being able to get it together.

I will ask Mr Allister a serious question. If the TUV were ever large enough to be entitled to a seat at the Executive

under d'Hondt, will he give a commitment, here and now, that he would never take that seat?

Mr Allister: Absolutely. It would give me the greatest possible pleasure — *[Laughter.]* — to repudiate that corrupt system for the formation of a Government, where you do not have to agree anything to be in government, and it is, therefore, no surprise that when you are in government, you cannot and do not need to agree anything. It is a perverse system from start to finish.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Unfortunately, I am running out of time.

We should have a Government formed by people — whoever they might be — who can agree what to do about the economy, health and education, provided that they can command the requisite majority, and those who cannot do that, whoever they might be, should form the opposition, but that threatens far too much of the vested interest in the House. That is why the House will never self-regulate itself into a working democratic institution and why it will cling to the hideous manifestations that demonstrate that it is a House not interested in people, —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Allister: — in democracy or in affording the fundamental rights that even schoolchildren can recognise: the right to vote a party out of Government and the right to have an opposition.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. I call Mr Steven Agnew. Mr Agnew, I have to tell you that there is a mere two minutes left.

Mr Agnew: OK. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will make the points quickly and simply.

In opening this debate, Mr Nesbitt said that we have an opportunity to move towards normalised Northern Ireland politics, but I fear that this is going to be an opportunity missed.

If we go into another region-wide election without transparency about political donations, it will be a disgrace, especially given that the next region-wide elections will elect our new councils, which are to have planning powers. We are going to have, as Mr Weir put it in a recent article in the 'County Down Spectator', councillors who will be judge, jury and executioner in making planning decisions, and yet they could still be, to the best that we know, funded by the very developers who put in those planning applications. To have such a system would be corrupt and undemocratic, but we have the opportunity to put that right, and we must do so.

I have heard the various arguments that, for security reasons, we cannot go towards full transparency, and I do not buy them for a second. We have taken soldiers off the streets and taken down the watchtowers. In fact, we have called on people to join the police, when it is the police who are under attack at present, not political parties. We still say that it is safe to join the police but it is not safe to tell people who gives money to political parties.

It is very clear that the parties in the House — the DUP, the UUP and the SDLP — that have called for continued secrecy about political donations do so in their self-interest and the interest of their donors but not the interest of democracy. There is not a requirement to give money to political parties. Indeed, if political parties had a bit less money, we might have freer and fairer elections, as Jim Allister said. You cannot make an informed choice if you are not made fully aware of who you are voting in. Until people know who is funding their parties, they will not know who decisions are being made in honour of.

As Mr Dickson rightly pointed out, although Sinn Féin called for transparency —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Agnew: — it needs to step up and do it. Since 2010, the Green Party has —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry; the Member's time is up.

Mr Agnew: — published its donations, and I encourage others to do the same.

Mr Lunn: I cannot help commenting that Mr Allister is not the first politician in the House to shout, "Never, never, never", and we know what happened there.

Mr Allister: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Lunn: I think Dr Paisley also meant it at the time.

Obviously, I support the amendment, but I am not going to spend too much time on it, because Mr Dickson has outlined our position, and it does not look as though we are going to get unqualified support around the House.

I will say once again that it has been 15 years since the Good Friday Agreement, and we really do not feel that it is necessary any more to protect people in this way. We are only talking about donations of over £7,500. We feel that the electorate has the right to know who is funding political parties, in particular corporate donors, which nobody mentioned; it is not always individuals.

We will move on from there. We managed to end the practice of double-jobbing almost immediately after the situation arose. In Westminster, I think that there are about 630 MPs, and, I think, only four — one, two, three, four — still double-job, and that indicates to me that 626 of them do not feel that it is possible.

No Member of the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament does it. It should be phased out sooner rather than later.

4.00 pm

We absolutely do not disagree with the principle of opposition. In fact, I am sure that every Member remembers the Alliance Party's paper that was issued in 2004. *[Laughter.]* I am sure that they will all remember it when I mention the title: it was called 'Agenda for Democracy' —

Mr Kennedy: Oh, that one?

Mr Lunn: Yes.

Mr Kennedy: We shredded that years ago.

Mr Lunn: Well, it was a thoughtful paper on the question of a formal opposition while incorporating power sharing and requiring qualified majority voting. We proposed that nine years ago.

The motion is quite wide-ranging. It calls for only one action, but there are a lot of suggestions in it. One is to do with the size of the Assembly. Our most recent

two manifestos indicated that we would be perfectly comfortable with an Assembly of about 80 Members. That figure was based on 16 constituencies rather than 18, and five Members per constituency.

If we are talking about reform of the Assembly and all the various items that are mentioned in the motion, we might have a better chance of achieving some of them in a five-year time span rather than a three-year one. I heard Mr Agnew's suggestion, but as much as the electorate seems to be cynical about what goes on up here, I am not sure whether it would really want us to bring an election forward. We will leave that hanging.

The call for action in the motion is for:

"all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster or to forfeit the expenses".

Mr Nesbitt gave us the figures in his opening remarks. Over £500,000 in expenses goes to Sinn Féin, and there is access to another £100,000 in short money. We are very familiar with Sinn Féin's stance; it has been going on for 100 years, and the party is totally implacable and dogmatic about it. I heard Pat Sheehan say that its MPs do the same job as everybody else. I contrast that with MLAs being elected here and not coming to the House. They would be more like councillors than MLAs. Westminster is a legislative assembly; perhaps far more so than this Assembly. If you are not there to involve yourself in legislation, Committees, scrutiny and all the other activities of the oldest Parliament in the world —

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Yes.

Mr B McCrea: I take the point that the Member is making, but does he not think that it would be better if we heard from all the Members who turn up to this place? We really ought to extend debating time so that time is made to hear the views of all the people who are democratically elected here and have a mandate.

Mr Lunn: The Member has taken the opportunity to make his point. It was not really related to what I was talking about.

I wonder when Sinn Féin will finally accept that times have changed. There may come a time when it does not need to stick to that particular dogmatic stance and its MPs could do the job that they are elected to do. I remind Sinn Féin that the Queen has visited Dublin. Martin McGuinness has shaken hands with the Queen. Sinn Féin has voted to fly the Union flag at Belfast City Hall. Times are changing.

Mr Sheehan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Yes.

Mr Sheehan: When Sinn Féin stands for Westminster elections, it does so on the basis of abstentionism. When people vote for Sinn Féin candidates and elect them, that is what is known as democracy.

Mr Lunn: I know that that is Sinn Féin's current policy. I am just making the suggestion that, some time in the not-too-distant future, perhaps it may think about —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Lunn: — reconsidering that policy.

I support the amendment. In the absence of support for that amendment, we will support the main motion.

Mr Elliott: It has been an interesting debate, and it is quite interesting that we are debating Westminster legislation in the Northern Ireland Assembly. We were supposed to be debating the Criminal Justice Bill tomorrow, which is meant to go through the Northern Ireland Assembly, but we cannot do that. It has been removed from the schedule because the Alliance Party Minister cannot get agreement between Sinn Féin and the SDLP on the amendments that he withdrew two weeks ago. Our debating of Westminster legislation is quite an unusual scenario.

I listened to Mr Allister, and maybe I will deal with his point first. Perhaps more people were interested that Mr Allister had addressed a post-primary education group at the Assembly, but I was more interested in his comments that followed. Mr Allister made it clear that he would not take a place at the Executive table, even if he were offered one. Mr Lunn then said that we have heard other people say, "never, never, never" in the House before. I assume that he was referring to another party, but he could also have been referring to his party. I recall the time that the Alliance Party was the bastion of opposition in the House. Members of that party said that they were the opposition. What happened? It was offered a place at the Executive table, and it refused it. No, sorry, they did not; they took it. My apologies to Mr Lunn; you took that place.

Mr Lunn: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: You do not have to clarify, but I will give way to you.

Mr Lunn: Just to clarify, we never said, "never, never, never". *[Interruption.]* In the situation we were in at that time, we did our best to provide an example of how an opposition could work in this place. *[Laughter.]* We never said that we would not accept office if we qualified, were offered it, and the Assembly voted us into that position.

Mr Elliott: It heartens me greatly to hear that clarification from Mr Lunn that the Alliance Party grabbed the chance to take a place at the Executive table when it could and forgot about being the opposition. It just left the opposition behind. That is very interesting.

Mr Allister, I am only saying that you should beware in case you get smitten with the same bug.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: I am happy to give way.

Mr Allister: I assure the honourable Member that some of us are made of sterner stuff than the Alliance Party. Members from that party boast about transparency. Yes, they are transparent: you can see right through them. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Elliott: That is all quite interesting.

I also listened to the points from Members of the SDLP. What Mr McDevitt, Mrs Kelly and Mr Maginness said about the Ulster Unionist Party was quite interesting. They said that we should be building partnerships. Of course we should be building partnerships. Mind you, the only people I see the SDLP building partnerships with are Sinn Féin Members. They have you on a little hanger, and when they say, "jump", you ask, "how high?"

Yes, Mr Maginness, we have often had opportunities to build relationships with your party, but those were rejected at every stage. When we needed your support to continue devolution, you let us down every time.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Elliott: Go ahead, Mr McDevitt.

Mr McDevitt: On this idea of partnership and hangers, it is curious that the SDLP is, in fact, engaged in an electoral contest against Sinn Féin in Mid Ulster. The last time I checked, Patsy McGlone will do rather well on Thursday. It is a pity that we cannot say the same about the Ulster Unionist Party. I wonder who really is under the cosh this week, Mr Elliott.

Mr Elliott: Mr McDevitt, you really do —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before Mr Elliott concludes, I believe that we are now well off the subject of the motion. Perhaps we could take a leaf out of that school's book, which, I am sure, stuck rigidly to the motion.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much for that guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I should not have taken those interventions, but, as you well know, I am a kindly person and like to give people the opportunity to have their say.

We are well aware of Mr McDevitt and his party signing petitions of concern to support Sinn Féin. It stopped the National Crime Agency operating here and helped to name a play park after a convicted terrorist in the Newry and Mourne District Council area. If we are going to build real partnerships, those are the type of issues that we need to get away from. I am quite happy to listen to that if it is really genuine.

Coming back to the representatives of Sinn Féin, I have to say that they never cease to amaze me. They never cease to surprise me with their attitudes. Openness and transparency? Maybe they could tell us where the £26 million from the Northern Bank robbery has gone, or where some of the bodies that their comrades-in-arms in the IRA buried and which have disappeared are. Maybe they could tell us about some of the actions that they carried out since 1970.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is not for me to tell the Chair what his responsibility is, but I think that you have to make a ruling on some of the comments made about Sinn Féin.

Mr Deputy Speaker: In fact, I can tell the Member that I was discussing the matter with the Clerks, and, of course, it is not your place to tell the Chair. *[Laughter.]* I remind the Member, please — this is the second time — that he has an important task, which is to sum up the debate and stick rigidly to it.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that it is my duty sometimes to remind those in the Chair of their responsibilities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I do not think that I should let that go. You did not need to remind the Chair, because I was discussing the matter with my Clerks. It is a serious offence to challenge the Chair.

Mr McCartney: I am not challenging the Chair.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Following on from that interchange between you and my colleague, I want to say that he raised a point of order on the basis that there was no intervention from the Deputy Speaker after a number of scurrilous remarks were made by another Member against our party. So, as far as I am concerned, I stand by my colleague's need to make an intervention on our behalf. Whether that is an advising or reminding intervention is a moot point, but I ask the LeasCheann Comhairle to reflect on the fact that it took a Member from this side of the House, on behalf of our party, to make an intervention before the matter was dealt with, and I think that that is regrettable and not really acceptable.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It is important for the Member to accept and understand that I was in the process of doing that. I was about to remind Mr Elliott that he should not make remarks about a political party in connection with bank robberies and other things for which it is not accountable.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, for that guidance, and I would not question your authority. I was merely replying to the debate and to Members who had spoken in it. Openness and transparency were clearly one of the issues; openness and transparency about —

Mr Sheehan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that you should make a ruling on accuracy. The transparency being discussed today concerns donations to political parties, and the Member is straying off that point.

Mr Allister: How much of the £26 million did you get?

Mr Sheehan: I beg your pardon?

Mr Allister: How much of the £26 million did you get?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Sheehan: That is three times today.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. My function here is to try to encourage Members to stick to the motion. I have endeavoured to do that, but I have not had the complete support of every Member, and that is to be regretted. I repeat that, at every stage, I have tried honestly to ensure that no political party should have any complaint. I am not happy with some of the remarks that were made, and I am most certainly not happy with the last remark that was made from a sedentary position. I trust that we can now, in a democratic way, complete the debate on the motion and go to the vote without any more disharmony.

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am prepared to take one more point of order, and then I must proceed.

Mr Maskey: I appreciate that you referred to the last remark made by a Member from a sedentary position, but will the LeasCheann Comhairle advise the House that he will consider those remarks? They were totally unacceptable, and it is not good enough that they will simply be noted by the House. In fact, I think that action needs to be taken.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I most certainly intend to take up the issue with the Speaker after the debate because I am not happy. Sorry — Mr Elliott, continue.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was in the process of saying that I was responding to the openness and transparency aspects of the debate. Clearly, as indicated here in the debate, a number of people have paid the ultimate price for their actions and their involvement in political activities.

4.15 pm

That is one of the obvious concerns that we have about allowing total openness in the donations aspect of the Bill. Some people face intimidation. It is still happening. Some organisations and groups take intimidatory actions against some of those who are involved in not only political parties but wider cultural activities. That is very unfortunate. If we could get away from that, I would fully support total openness and transparency, and I know that the Ulster Unionist Party would also support it. Unfortunately, we are not at that stage, simply because we still have a terrorist threat in Northern Ireland, which is very unfortunate and concerning. One of the issues that we highlighted when speaking to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee was the danger that the openness that it is looking for could bring about. If we can get to that stage, so be it and so much the better.

We clearly have to recognise that a number of those who lost their life in Northern Ireland because of their political involvement came from all sides of the community. It would be unfortunate if we let this pass without expressing and acknowledging that quite clearly. Mr Dickson was quite clear in what he said about that, and I accept where he is coming from. However, we obviously have a difference of opinion on that point.

We in the Ulster Unionist Party were criticised by other parties for bringing forward the motion. Why? Why should we not have this debate openly? Mr McDevitt argued that this was for the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, but it is also for the House to debate. We need to bring these things out into the open in this Chamber. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee has not brought forward any proposals on a number of these issues, so why should we not debate those aspects in the Chamber?

Mr Deputy Speaker, I apologise that the debate ended up in the fractious way that it did. However, you cannot accept that we and I will sit back and take some of the aggression that comes from other parties and that we will not have our say when making a winding-up speech. So, I make no apology for putting forward those aspects that I and the Ulster Unionist Party believe in. I hope that voters in Mid Ulster this week send back a representative in Nigel Lutton who will actually represent the people there. Thank you.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 12; Noes 69.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Byrne, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Overend and Mr Spratt

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 47; Noes 32.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Sheehan

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; supports the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates; welcomes the recognition within the Bill that political donations in Northern Ireland require sensitivity; acknowledges that further work is needed on measures that are still under consideration for potential inclusion in the Bill, including the creation of a formal Opposition in

the Assembly, the size of the Assembly and the length of the Assembly term; and calls on all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster or to forfeit the expenses that they claim from Parliament.

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

Meat Products

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Irwin: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes Northern Ireland's excellent reputation for producing high-quality food; expresses concern at the ongoing incidents surrounding meat products; encourages retailers to source more food products from Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with retailers to ensure that processors and farmers get a better return for their products.

At the very outset, I declare an interest as a farmer and a primary producer.

4.45 pm

Northern Ireland's reputation as a premium producer of high-quality food products is a status that has been hard fought for. That reputation is a result of the farming community being wholly committed to the long-term survival and growth of the industry. The level of effort that is required for modern-day farming is not to be taken lightly. The farmer expends considerable resources to produce the food that we all enjoy every day, yet the reward that he receives is totally inadequate. Farmers must cope with an ever-changing marketplace, which, by all accounts, they have little control over. The red tape and regulations that are associated with farming require hours of paperwork and constant checking to ensure that everything is compliant. That is time lost without reimbursement. The farmer is not paid for that time, nor can he take it in lieu; it is part of the farmer's daily routine.

Input costs for running a farm, such as fuel and energy, continue to rise. Those costs are unable to be passed on to compensate the farmer. The farmer must somehow continue to swallow up those significant increases. That simply is not sustainable in the long term. Farmers across the Province have, no doubt, been heartened considerably by the spell of dry weather that we have experienced in recent days. I am of the firm belief that there will, of course, always be a seed time and harvest, although it has certainly been extremely challenging over the past 12 months. The weather is out of the farmer's control, and some might say that that is just as well. The extremely wet weather in recent months has had a massive effect on farming operations, such as planting, harvesting and getting animals to grass. There is a lack of feed for wintering, and there have been problems with slurry spreading prior to the closed period. Again, that has meant farmers having to spend more simply to stand still. In many other industries, a company is able to factor in such costs and, over a period of time, recoup such expenses. However, in the agrifood sector, the primary producer is limited in his or her ability to claw back those outgoings. Farmers are already making huge efficiencies in their operations to ensure that every move that is made is one that uses the least amount of resources while still allowing

the farm to function as a business. However, that is with regard only to things that are within their control. As I said, farmers have no control over outside pressures.

The horse meat scandal has proven, without any doubt, the true value of our local agrifood industry. Our local butchers are certainly testimony to that in recent weeks, with many reporting a significant uptake in many products. Consumers are clearly very happy with our home-grown produce. The agrifood sector's strict traceability requirements have given the consumer a level of confidence that has been missing for some of the imported products that are bought in the larger supermarkets. Consumers have been setting the pace by visiting their local butcher in greater numbers or by choosing products from the meat counters in many of our supermarkets. Many consumers have rejected the cheaper, processed products that have been at the source of the recent investigations. Given that our traceability is among the most comprehensive in Europe, I am fully supportive of the call for retailers to source more meat products from our home industry.

It must be realised that there would not be a local agrifood sector were it not for the farmer as the primary producer. It is only fair and proper that, as the first and most vital link in the supply chain, the farmer is more fairly treated and receives a fair price for his produce. In contributions to the House last week, I stated the importance of our industry continuing to develop to add value to our local produce, including dairy and horticultural products. That remains a very important part of the growth strategy for the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been active in helping to promote our fantastic local produce to a world market. Those efforts are not going unnoticed, so I urge her to continue in that important work. However, the farmer must be fairly paid in a way that reflects the efforts that are invested in bringing our local food to the table. Farm incomes fell alarmingly in 2012, by around 50%, owing to a wide range of factors, some of which I have covered already. That has taken a heavy toll on farmers, no doubt.

The supply chain must react to that hardship and move to a realistic pricing system that would see changes in how the bigger retailers source and price their lines. The Agri-Food Strategy Board must invest time and effort in confronting that make-or-break obstacle for our primary producers, and I urge the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to use her influence and offices to help to achieve the price security that our farmers deserve.

We have heard much of the quality of our local meat in the press in recent weeks. Now it is time to see farmers receive a fair return on the investment, time, money and effort involved in reaching that high level of quality. Our industry depends on it.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend the proposer of this timely motion for bringing it to the House. I also commend our local agriculture industry and primary producers, of which there are many in my constituency and in many other rural constituencies. The primary producers in our local agriculture sector are a good source of employment in local communities and are often the only source of income in many family homes, so their importance to our wider local economy cannot be overstated.

The recent questions over the quality of meat could have been disastrous for the entire agrifood sector, but it is my view that we have overcome the worst of that. We are now back on the path and can clearly state that all meat coming out of here is safe for people to consume. That is the important message that we all need to state. I know that the Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, along with many other people, has been keen to state that on every possible occasion. I join him in giving those reassurances. Even though our primary producers clearly have not been involved in this, they have unfortunately been affected by it and suffer greatly from its outworkings, so we need to see what can be done to assist those primary producers who may have been impacted on by the negative connotations that may be there, particularly towards red meat. We need to reassure people that meat is safe.

For a change, I went out for dinner last night with my wife and enjoyed a good steak. I am sure that there are many in our community who are not as well fed as I am, but I would like to tell people that that is a very rare occurrence — I usually eat chicken.

Our agriculture producers need greater support. They need support from government, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development have created the Agri-Food Strategy Board to see how best they can provide that support at an Executive level. Agriculture producers need support from Europe, and there are continuing negotiations on CAP reform and how it can best help our primary producers. However, they also need support from our local retailers and customers. Support local meat and local butchers, and ensure that whatever meat you are buying is sourced locally. In that way, you can be guaranteed of its quality and traceability.

In his opening contribution, William Irwin fully outlined many of the other challenges that face farmers, and I will not rehash any of his well-made points. He did a good job, so I will not bore people by doing that.

Finally, I welcome the Minister back from her recent trade mission, and I congratulate her and all those organisations that were away with her showcasing our projects. I wish all those companies who went with her, hoping for business, all the best.

Mr Byrne: I support the motion and congratulate those who tabled it. I had hoped to table an amendment, but there were logistical reasons as to why that did not happen.

The agrifood sector is very important to Northern Ireland, as it is now a £4 billion industry and has the potential to grow further. It continues to grow despite the recession. As you know, it sustains over 92,000 jobs, both directly and indirectly, and accounts for 20% of manufacturing. For those reasons, we cannot allow it to slide owing to uncertainty about the authenticity of any of our Northern Ireland food products. For it to continue to grow, we need to sustain its good reputation and ensure that consumers and purchasers have confidence in the industry. Reputation and confidence are paramount. For that to happen, we have to be more proactive than reactive, as the recent food crisis has demonstrated.

The recent samples that have shown various levels of horse DNA in processed meat products in these islands

have caused grave concern among consumers. The question we must ask is this: how can we prevent this from happening in future?

We need a quality assured scheme that will do as it suggests: assure quality so that consumers get the level of quality and goodness that they are entitled to in the products that they buy in the supermarket. We have an excellent farm quality assurance scheme that relates to food products leaving the farm in Northern Ireland, but there are obvious gaps in the food traceability system from farm gate to supermarket shelf. We do not have national or EU-wide robust systems of food safety standards and quality assurance.

A number of agencies are involved in the food industry, but a disjointed traceability and verification system in the food chain pertains. We have environmental health officers in local councils in relation to all food premises and food hygiene, which comes under the auspices of the Department of the Environment (DOE); we have the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) veterinary inspection service that relates mainly to farms, marts, slaughtering houses and cutting premises, and that is obviously in DARD; we have meat processing plants with on-site meat inspectors, which come under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI); and we have the Food Standards Agency (FSA), which comes under the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and relates to food safety, food authenticity and labelling. Obviously, we have a very disjointed system.

The FSA says that it is committed to open and transparent working, and it has briefed the media regularly to reassure the public about food products on sale. It is important that consumers are assured by the public authorities and are given full information to make informed and confident decisions on the food that they buy.

We are all aware that DARD figures for 2011-12 show that farm incomes have dropped from £290 million to around £143 million, which is a drop of over 50%. Farmers are faced with increasing costs. Feed prices have risen, we have had poor weather, and we have had increases in fertiliser and fuel prices. Even the value of the single farm payment has fallen due to currency fluctuations between the euro and sterling. Quite simply, farmers need better prices at the farm gate. Currently, they are not recovering the cost of production. However, those higher production costs are not reflected in the price that the farmers receive. Food processors and retailers are caught in the dilemma that consumers want to buy food cheaply but, as the recent crisis has shown us, not at any cost. They want to be assured that the food that they and their families eat is of a certain quality and standard. The big retailers demand lower prices from the processing industry, and they exercise a lot of the purchasing power.

We need to get back to buying as much as possible locally. Many local butchers are enjoying more trade and turnover since the recent crisis. Food processors and retailers need to source as much as possible locally, so that consumers know that they are getting the best quality possible. That would ensure that the farmers and the processors get a better return, as well as giving consumers a good deal.

Some of the imported meat products have given rise to major concerns —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr Byrne: — about quality and accurate or inaccurate labelling. EU-wide traceability is needed now more than ever. I thank the Minister for being present. Hopefully, we will hear some positive news.

Mrs Overend: I state my support for the motion at the outset. It is certainly timely, given the events surrounding the local meat producers and the challenges that they continue to face.

I am on record as clearly outlining my support for our local farmers and processors. I said in the House last week:

> *"In light of the recent horse meat scandal, I take this opportunity to put on record the fact that I have complete trust and confidence in our local quality assured beef." [Official Report, This Bound Volume 82, p250, col 2].*

I repeat that sentiment today.

The motion rightly refers to the excellent reputation that Northern Ireland has for producing high-quality food, and there are many examples of that. I think specifically of Glenarm Beef, whose organic beef has already won several prestigious awards and is served in several leading Belfast restaurants and hotels. I think locally of the mid-Ulster area and McKee's Butchers and Ditty's Home Bakery, which has won several prestigious awards. In my constituency of Mid Ulster we also have the Karro Food Group, which is best known for its Cookstown sizzle. It is Northern Ireland's most popular pork products brand and is a major supporter of our agriculture industry. The success of Moy Park is also well documented as Northern Ireland's largest food processing business, and it remains one of our top companies employing more than 5,000 people here.

5.00 pm

Those are just some examples of what Northern Irish producers have to offer. None of it would be possible without the fantastic reputation that has been built up over the years. We must not let the ongoing situation regarding horse meat negatively affect those who are producing our local meat products because all evidence thus far suggests that they are complying with the relevant safety and quality regulations and bringing first-class local produce into the food chain. However, we cannot overlook the fact that incidents surrounding meat products are still ongoing. For example, my colleague Jo-Anne Dobson, following questions to the Agriculture Minister, was able to find out that horse meat had been found in burgers supplied to the Greenmount and Loughry campuses of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

We have also been informed in recent weeks that burgers containing horse meat had been supplied to hospitals and schools in Northern Ireland. Massive chains such as Lidl, Tesco, Asda and Aldi all experienced incidents of potential contamination as well. Investigations must continue by the Food Standards Agency and, especially, by the retailers, who have displayed an alarming lack of vigilance in some cases in order to uncover the full extent of horse meat in food processed in Northern Ireland. Only then can we begin to restore and regain the confidence of consumers in the long term.

Perhaps the Minister will update the House today on the actions that she is taking in her responsibilities regarding the economy to ensure that the matter is being fully investigated. How is the Minister reassuring the many overseas importers of meat from our producers that our products remain at the high standards that we have all come to expect?

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment can act to ensure that our processors and farmers are getting as good a return as possible on their products, as the motion suggests. For example, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has confirmed that a groceries code adjudicator will, hopefully, be up and running by mid-2013. That new role must have the necessary powers, and its independence must not be in question. If enacted properly, it has the potential to benefit some 311,000 farms, and it must ensure that supermarkets treat all their suppliers fairly and within the law.

I ask the Minister for an update on the establishment of the adjudicator and what discussions she has had with the relevant officials at Westminster on that. I have mentioned the reputation of our produce, and the Minister can work to protect and grow that reputation.

To conclude, the main way for people to ensure that they are buying quality meat is to buy local. Therefore, it is fundamentally important that all of us, including the Minister, continue to encourage people to do that as much as possible.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion. It asks for two things: it encourages retailers to source more food products in Northern Ireland; and it calls on the Minister to try to ensure that our processors and farmers get a better return. I do not know how many times I have heard major supermarkets telling us how much produce they source locally; I am sure that they say it in every area where they set up a big store. The first thing that they tell us is that they will source as much of their produce locally as they possibly can. They give us all kinds of figures, but I wonder what percentage of their input actually comes from local producers.

Joe Byrne said that our farmers are being priced out. Even when they cannot cover their costs, they are still being underpriced by other producers around the world in the mad dash for the cheapest possible food. Pardon the pun, but, in the past few weeks, the chickens have come home to roost.

The supply chains for Tesco and others, which have been exposed as selling deficient goods, have been proven to be not adequately covered or checked, and the labelling is not right. Frankly, I would hope that the first thing that all supermarkets would do is acknowledge that there has been a problem in a particular supply chain, and close it down. If they have been importing goods from Romania or wherever and a percentage of horse meat or horse DNA was found in them, they should not buy any more from that supplier. It is as simple as that.

That would lead towards buying more local produce. It would certainly lead them to buying produce from countries that have an excellent record of traceability. I am not a farmer, but I am constantly assured that nowhere in the world is the traceability regime better than ours, so they should, obviously, be buying local, but that leads to the question of how much they are prepared to pay. It also leads to the question of how much the public is prepared to pay for such produce off the shelves.

There have been food scares over the years when public demand for a product dropped. At the moment, demand for processed meals such as lasagne and moussaka has gone through the floor, but I would guess that, in a year's time, demand will be back up because people like those things. Frankly, they are cheap and cheerful and perhaps people have to buy them in the present economic circumstances.

The next part of the motion calls on the Minister:

> *"to work with retailers to ensure that ... farmers get a better return".*

I hope that the Minister can find some way to put pressure on the people who matter in that industry to do exactly that. At the end of the day, it is a free and very competitive market. I hope that market forces and competitive pressures do not gradually bring about this situation again. I hope that a situation in which we find horse meat in what is supposed to be a beef product will never recur. As somebody who kept a horse for a few years for my daughter, the very thought of that turns my stomach. I read an article in 'The Sunday Times' yesterday that stated that, if you went to Verona, I believe, you have a choice of about six horse meat dishes in an expensive restaurant. That just indicates how things can be completely different in other parts of the world.

It is not all to do with meat these days. I have a thing about the way that salmon is produced and farmed. I think it is downright disgusting. I watched a programme the other night about prawn production in Thailand — I do not know whether anybody here saw it — that is part of a campaign by Hugh what's-his-name about fish production and waste around the world. If you let them, such programmes would put you off food for life, and I am not sure what you would eat.

I will go back to the main point. Northern Ireland producers have the capacity to produce the best meat that there is. It is within the power of the local Tesco, Sainsbury's, Aldi or Marks and Spencer to try to buy that at a price —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Lunn: — that gives them the opportunity to make a profit and also gives farmers the opportunity to make a turn on their hard work. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on the issue.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. Northern Ireland is renowned for producing high-quality farm produce, and we can rightly be proud of the continued success of our agrifood sector. That is one of our growth industries, and it is right and proper that we continue to protect and enhance it.

Some of our local products have gained world renown, especially those with Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status under European Union law, such as Comber spuds and Lough Neagh eels. We must continually look to build on that.

The sector has great potential, as was demonstrated in the 'Appetite for Growth' document produced by the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association in March 2012. The sector can play a real part in helping to rebalance and

grow our economy. World markets are opening up more than ever, and I know that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is consistently working on potential new markets for our local products. We fully support that and look forward to new doors opening.

The agrifood sector is a huge employer across Northern Ireland and has been for many years. Therefore, it must continue to be supported in every way possible. Our farmers have come through many difficult times in the past and have continued to produce top-quality food. The year 2012 was very challenging for our farmers because of the cost of animal feedstuff, the increased costs of fertilisers and the ever-increasing costs of energy and fuel.

Our farm quality assurance scheme, operated by the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) in Northern Ireland, has proved to be effective. The fact that every cut of meat is labelled with traceability details in the abattoir, under regulated conditions, gives customers confidence. The real risk to consumers comes from processed meat, which, in law, is meat that is defined as fresh until it is minced. It effectively becomes processed when salt, herbs and other products are added.

The risk from processed meat is compounded by the fact that meat is sold as a commodity in the world market and is sold from dealer to dealer without their even seeing or verifying the standards of the produce. Such meat often starts at a low price, and quality can be compromised, but the responsibility for the quality of the raw material lies with processors. The processors who supply meat for burgers and ready meals must put in place an effective quality assurance system to give assurance to the customers that what is on the supermarket shelf is exactly what is specified on the label.

Supermarkets must ensure that processed products are supplied, as per a contract, from their suppliers, have systems in place to verify the quality of the product and take effective action against non-compliance. Supermarkets and their suppliers must be held to account for feeding non-compliant food to the hungry public.

We must continue to promote markets for local produce outside of the UK and get customers to further experience our quality produce with assurance. There is great potential for our local produce in the world markets, and I trust that there will be continued work between our producers and with Invest NI and InterTradeIreland. Trade shows and exhibits can often be beneficial in reaching out to new markets, and I know that our Minister has been leading on that for some time.

We have a great reputation for producing high-quality food. We are concerned at the ongoing incidents surrounding some meat products and call on retailers to place a greater emphasis on local produce. It is important that we continue to work with retailers to ensure that our farmers and processors get a fair deal for their product. I urge the House to support the motion.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I am a member of the ETI Committee and support the motion. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and thank the proposer for tabling it.

It is useful to acknowledge the support that has been shown for the industry from a number of contributors today. A number of points have been made, which I do not think need to be repeated, but we must remind ourselves that the meat industry is worth £1 million annually in the North's economy. Farmers in the North of Ireland have certainly struggled with low prices and high costs for fertiliser, feed and fuel, so there is no doubt that the sector needs support. DETI, therefore, needs to work with DARD to ensure that that support and those mechanisms are in place.

The recent horse meat controversy has shaken consumers' confidence, but it must be stressed, as Members mentioned, that our local farmers and primary producers were not involved. As the proposer said, our local produce is fully traceable, and its quality is second to none. Consumers are seeking that quality here and abroad, so we need to support the sector and ensure that this is a key part of our export-led strategy towards economic recovery.

I support the motion and look forward to the Minister's response on how those practical measures can be put in place. Go raibh maith agat.

5.15 pm

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Members who brought the important motion to the House for debate. No one needs to be reminded of the huge problems that the agrifood sector has faced over recent weeks. People's trust in food has been shaken. Once that confidence is gone, it is, often, very difficult to get it back. However, it is very important to remember that although the industry may have been caught up in the scandal, producers, namely farmers, have done nothing wrong. I am as confident of the quality of meat that farmers produce today as I was a month ago. We must not allow a small number of cases to hold back an entire industry.

The motion, rightly, calls on retailers to source more food locally. Representing a constituency such as Upper Bann, which is a mix of towns and open countryside, has given me a wonderful insight into the very fine balance between the pressures of producing food on the farm and making it affordable for the wider public. I am pleased that there remains great trust in local farmers and that most consumers have realised that the problem originated in other member states of the European Union. Local farmers produce world-leading products, and, over recent years, the wider agrifood sector has become a beacon of hope in an otherwise difficult economic environment.

It would, however, be wrong for us to stand here today and demand that all food be sourced locally and bought only from local butchers. Although that may be the preferred choice for many people, we need to accept that for others, buying all of their meat in the traditional butcher's setting, with the extra cost, is just not an option.

Supermarkets are to be congratulated for making meat affordable and readily available. However, I believe that the balance has now tipped and that quality may be suffering for the sake of price. One really has to wonder about the contents of a box of burgers being sold for £1. The recent announcement that farm income fell by over 50% in 2012 means that any huge profits being made by supermarkets are, clearly, not being passed on to farmers.

The plight of dairy farmers is well known, but beef producers have also faced an incredibly difficult couple of years of rising costs for fuel, feed and fertiliser while

farm-gate prices have not been keeping up. That is why I support the motion's call for the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with retailers to ensure that processors and farmers get a better return for their products.

I expect that, over time, and with the findings of the investigation, we will, one day, learn what went wrong and how it was allowed to happen. It is intolerable that people were deceived into thinking that what looked like perfectly good beef produce, going by the label, actually contained something very different. It is deeply regrettable that the situation was allowed to occur. There are many questions to be answered, not least by the Food Standards Agency and food processors. The number one priority right now, however, must be to ensure that the contents of the food on shelves are as stated on the label and that the wider agrifood sector is not shaken any more than it has been already. I support the motion.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I join Members in congratulating those who brought the motion to the Floor. It provides the Assembly with a timely opportunity to highlight all that is good about Northern Ireland's agrifood and to send a clear message to consumers, not just here in Northern Ireland but throughout the world, that the food produced here is among the best in the world.

I have no hesitation in endorsing the following statement in the motion:

> *"That this Assembly notes Northern Ireland's excellent reputation for producing high-quality food".*

As the Member who moved the motion pointed out, that reputation has been hard won, and we must recognise that in the Chamber today.

My support for the agrifood sector is founded on practical experience. Coming from Fermanagh, I have been surrounded by agriculture all my life, and I have seen at first hand the high-quality produce that comes from our farms. As Enterprise Minister, I have had the opportunity to visit many food processors, large and small, and I have been continually impressed by their drive and concern for quality and excellence.

As Mr Flanagan mentioned, only last week I was with Northern Ireland food companies at the Gulfood show in Abu Dhabi — actually it was in Dubai; I was in Abu Dhabi about something else — and I assure you that there is clear demand in that region and, indeed, across the globe, for the excellent product that we have to offer. I was very encouraged by the contacts that were made and the networking that was achieved at the Gulfood event.

We can be justifiably proud that Northern Ireland has a long tradition of quality food production. That has resulted in a sector that has continued to grow, despite the recession, that has a turnover of some £4 billion and that accounts for almost 20% of total Northern Ireland manufacturing sales, most of which are sold to external markets. The sector also provides employment for approximately 50,000 people, 18,000 of whom are in food processing and many of whom are employed in rural areas. Indeed, as we heard, the Northern Ireland Food and Drink Association report has highlighted the potential for the creation of up to 15,000 new jobs in the sector by 2020. So, in short, the sector is very important to the Northern Ireland economy. That is why it is recognised as a priority sector in our economic strategy, with the distribution of the sector's activity right across Northern Ireland supporting the economic strategy's cross-cutting principle of balanced subregional growth.

Agrifood has also been recognised as a priority in the Programme for Government for the very first time. The Programme for Government commits us to developing a strategic plan that will identify priorities for the sector through to 2020. The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I have appointed the Agri-Food Strategy Board to develop the strategic plan, and we anticipate receipt of that plan in the next few weeks. There is no doubt that the Executive fully recognise the importance and, more than that, the value of our agrifood sector. That is based on the excellent quality of the food that we produce.

That brings me to the second point in the motion, which is that the Assembly:

> *"expresses concern at the ongoing incidents surrounding meat products".*

The revelations in recent weeks about the contamination of processed meat products highlight a problem that appears to extend the length and breadth of Europe, impacting, as many Members indicated, on consumer confidence. This is a European-wide issue. In fact, it is even outside Europe. The Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson, correctly described it as a Europe-wide scandal.

Food businesses throughout the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and right across Europe have been the subject of what appears to be widespread and systematic fraud. I am encouraged that governments across Europe are taking action to resolve the issue, and EU-wide DNA testing of processed meat products is under way as a means to raise consumer confidence in such products.

We have confidence that the Commission is treating the meat contamination as a case of fraudulent misuse of the labelling system for economic gain, and it has tasked Europol with co-ordinating different criminal investigations right across Europe. Closer to home, the Food Standards Agency and the police, working with our counterparts across Europe, are involved in what is a complicated and far-reaching investigation. The FSA will continue to work closely with businesses and trade bodies along the whole food chain to try to get to the bottom of what is a totally unacceptable situation to root out any illegal activity and enforce good safety and authenticity regulation. It plans to take whatever action is necessary.

I assure the House that DETI and DARD are working closely with the FSA in Northern Ireland to ensure that all efforts will be made to protect that hard-won reputation of our home-grown produce and, indeed, its contribution to the economy. We cannot — this point was made by a couple of Members — allow the Europe-wide fraud to tarnish our long track record as a source of quality meat produce. The meat sector is an important part of our agrifood sector, and all efforts must be made to protect its reputation. I welcome the fact that, over the past six months, the price of beef throughout the UK has increased. Our quality beef, which is reared on a grass-based system, has a justified reputation as a premium

product. Consumers can have absolute confidence that it is totally natural and of the highest quality available.

The traceability controls in our agrifood supply chain emphasise the benefits to consumers and businesses of purchasing local produce. There are environmental, economic and social benefits, and there is also the integrity and safety of our produce. The Northern Ireland beef and lamb farm quality assurance scheme celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. Therefore, we have a long and successful track record of delivering extensive traceability controls through the supply chain.

Mr Byrne raised the issue of European traceability. Of course, there is no issue with traceability and quality assurance for produce that originates in Northern Ireland. The traceability runs from the farm right through the processing system and onwards. However, there is no quality assurance for produce that is imported into Northern Ireland. That is a European issue, or perhaps even an outside-of-Europe issue. It is something that, hopefully, Europe will look at when it carries through the DNA tests.

Our track record in Northern Ireland in delivering quality meat has enabled companies to move ahead of the pack in events such as the UK Great Taste Awards. Hannan Meats was the supreme champion last year. The year before that, it was another butcher from Northern Ireland: McCartney's butchers in Moira. They are both great examples of how a Northern Ireland company can work with Invest Northern Ireland on new product development, employee training and export marketing, and then become a leader in its class. Hannan Meats and McCartney's are two examples that show why we should continue to promote our local red meat on the export market.

The motion states that we should encourage:

> *"retailers to source more food products from Northern Ireland; and ... work with retailers to ensure that processors and farmers get a better return for their products."*

Obviously, I am in complete agreement with those points. The large retailers have an absolutely crucial role to play in restoring consumer confidence. The meat contamination scandal has very much demonstrated what consumers want. They need to have confidence in the food that they buy. We need to provide that confidence in future. There is a real opportunity for retailers to meet ever-more exacting consumer demands by sourcing more food locally. I accept what Mr Lunn said about retailers: when they come to Northern Ireland, they are very keen to tell us how much they are sourcing from local farms, but at what price? That is the key element. There has been a downward pressure on prices. Almost everybody in the House made the point that, although food bills are increasing, the spending ability of households in Northern Ireland is coming under increasing pressure. The retailers are saying that they must get it for less. That, of course, has an impact on not just our farmers but our food and meat processors.

There is clearly a need to engage. I intend to engage with the major retailers so that we can have a real conversation about the price of food. Mrs Overend spoke about the supermarket adjudicator. I intend to meet her. I will indicate that it is vital that the body have teeth. We need to ensure that we can achieve a fair return right along the supply chain, not just for the retailers. The major retailers recognise the need for constructive engagement. Some of you will have seen some of the ads that Tesco placed recently. Tesco's aim is to bring its meat production closer to home, and it plans to work closer with British farmers in sourcing its meat, which I welcome. However, there is a long way to travel. We need to ensure that the retailers recognise the damage that has been caused and that we can help them. I think that it is an opportunity for our meat processors and farmers in Northern Ireland.

5.30 pm

I am very proud of the red meat industry, as all of us in the House should be. I will work with DARD and support the producers and processors in any way that I can.

Mr Frew: I rise, of course, to commend the motion to the House, I am glad that the debate has gone the way it has. It has been a spirited debate, in which Members supported and defended our agrifood sector, particularly the local meat producers.

It is vital that we keep championing the local producers, farmers and processors who do this so well, and who produce quality produce that is second to none throughout the world. I will never grow tired of echoing that message, nor will I shy away from it. I will echo it every hour of every day if I have to. I will defend and, more importantly, promote our produce. It is fully traceable from the gate to the plate, and it is green, clean, grass-fed meat. I have been saying those slogans so often and for so long that I think I say them in my sleep.

We cannot afford to allow the scandals to hamper or reduce the capabilities of our agrifood sector to promote, sell and export our produce across the world. It is vital that we take advantage of the present scandals. We can prove how traceable and clean our food is, so we have to promote our produce in that way.

Only last week, we had a debate about the giants of the agrifood sector: poultry meat; beef and sheep meat; bakeries; and milk and milk products. It is vital that we promote this industry. It is so important to our economy and affects every corner of this Province. It is vital that we talk about this as often as we can, echo the messages that our farmers and local butchers tell us, get them on the airwaves and the TV and tell the people around the world and in Northern Ireland that the meat we produce is safe, clean and of top quality. It can be sold around the world, and it is second to none throughout the world.

I am the Chair of the Agriculture Committee, and my Deputy Chair, Joe Byrne, also spoke in the debate. The Committee has written to the supermarkets. When we were out and about talking to farmers, we saw that there was anger. There was anger, right in the throes of the scandal, about how this could have happened. We have a traceable system, and when we sell our meat, it is proven to be of high quality. We wrote to the supermarkets asking them to explain their food supply chains and how they think this could have happened. We also asked them, if fraud is happening, where they think it is happening; what they are doing to protect the food supply chain; why the supply chain is stacked so much against primary producers and farmers; and why they are not protecting farmers better. Given that farmers produce top quality meat, why do the supermarkets not use it more? Why do they shy away from

it? Why do they not spend the extra money to get the best-quality meat they can to stack their shelves? Why do they not sell the best produce, rather than trying to make their large profit margins even larger?

I do not see much of that profit coming down to farmers and producers. In fact, it is stacked heavily against our primary producers — the very people who produce so much top-quality meat. They have been let down, and that is something that we cannot and should not stand for. In the throes of this debacle and in the heat of this scandal, we showed a united front throughout the House and throughout the Departments. However, it is fair to say that the Agriculture Minister went missing for the first weeks when she should have been out with me, promoting and protecting our industry. She did come back, she did recover, and we did show a united front, but it was slow, and I hope that she has learned a lesson from that. As Agriculture Minister, she is there to protect, to promote and to enhance the farmers of this country, and she needs to do that much more quickly than she has in this scandal. I hope that there will be lessons learnt, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I will wind up this very important debate. William Irwin, who moved the motion, talked about farmers not getting a fair share of the profit and that that trend is all too prevalent in our industry. They are being hammered at every end by the other people in the supply chain — something that I have talked about. He talked about the trend back to the local butcher's shop and to the meat counters of our supermarkets. He also mentioned the fall in farmers' incomes and, again, how farmers, despite being under pressure all the time, are still producing top-quality meat.

Phil Flanagan talked about the message that was going out to the public. He mentioned his meals out buying big juicy steaks. I was going to ask for an intervention to see whether he had had sirloin or fillet, but I thought better of it. However, it is good that we can show a united front to our industry.

Joe Byrne is the Deputy Chairperson of the Agriculture Committee. We work well together in that Committee, and I support his words in the debate, but we need better Europe-wide traceability systems. He talked about the various roles and responsibilities of Departments in Northern Ireland. Yes, lessons could be learned. He also talked about the disjoint, and that is something that we could do better. He also talked about farm incomes and how the farmer is getting hammered every year — year in, year out. He also mentioned applying pressure on the supermarkets, which is vital, because they are such an important part of the supply chain.

Sandra Overend said that the motion was timely and congratulated us on it. We commend the support that she has given us, and the industry, at this time. Her message has been on-message, too, and I congratulate her on that. We have shown a united front. It is important to keep reminding people how well we produce meat. It should be exported, and it is exported throughout the world. She also mentioned how deeply horse meat has penetrated our systems and our food chains. Of course, that was a worry, and we await eagerly the end of this investigation and the ongoing DNA testing.

Trevor Lunn talked about supermarkets saying that they were sourcing local produce. What are the percentages? That is a very good question that we should put to the supermarkets. What do you mean by local? That is a big issue for some trademarks and some named producers and processors. How local is local? Why are they not checking their supply chains? How did this happen? How did they allow it to happen? He talked about the price of food and about what supermarkets are prepared to pay for produce, and what the public is prepared to pay for produce. This is a very important debate. It is something that we grapple with — and governments grapple with all over the world. It is vital.

Gordon Dunne, my colleague, talked about the pressures on farmers and the differences in fresh meat produced here compared with imported processed meat. He talked about the great potential for our agrifood sector to take advantage of this scandal and to show the world the traceable and clean meat that we produce.

Maeve McLaughlin talked about how vital this was to our economy. We have a fully traceable system, which is proof. I had no doubt whatsoever, when I was promoting our industry, that we could stand by that traceable system.

Sam Gardiner talked about the confidence in food having been shaken, but our farmers have done nothing wrong, and we cannot allow a few bad apples to destroy our industry, which is so vital to our economy.

Again, the Minister talked about the excellent work she was doing for the agrifood sector and about the Agri-Food Strategy Board, which is a joint initiative with the Agriculture and Rural Development Minister. She talked about the Europe-wide DNA testing —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Frew: — that is in practice at the moment. She mentioned that work was ongoing with the FSA and other Departments. The Minister also mentioned the fact that the meat that we produce is so traceable that we should be standing over it and exporting it all round the world.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes Northern Ireland's excellent reputation for producing high-quality food; expresses concern at the ongoing incidents surrounding meat products; encourages retailers to source more food products from Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with retailers to ensure that processors and farmers get a better return for their products.

Adjourned at 5.40 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 5 March 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Final Stage

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I beg to move

> *That the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/11-15] do now pass.*

I would like to record my sincere thanks to the Chair, Deputy Chair and members of the Committee for Regional Development for their timely and effective scrutiny of this important Bill. I am grateful for the wide support shown for the measure, which is required to make good my party's commitment and the Executive's commitment to hard-pressed families that no additional water charges will be introduced during this Assembly.

As Members are now well aware, the Bill will also make a further technical amendment to the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 to require certain notifications in respect of the laying of pipes and sewers to be registered as statutory charges. Without further ado, the important Bill before us is a necessary and sensible measure. It eases pressure on families. It strikes the right balance at a difficult time, and I am pleased to commend it to the Assembly.

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Labhraím inniu mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Forbartha Réigiúnaí le tacaíocht a thabhairt don Bhille Seirbhísí Uisce agus Séarachais. I speak today as the Deputy Chair of the Committee for Regional Development to voice the Committee's support for the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill.

The Committee received the Bill into Committee Stage on completion of the Second Stage on 27 November 2012. The Committee invited written and oral evidence from stakeholders, all of which supported the delivery of the Programme for Government priority 2 commitment. There were, however, some concerns with regard to the current governance structure in NIW and in respect of the wider consultation on the options paper that the Minister had provided for his Executive colleagues and which is being considered by the Budget scrutiny committee. With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will briefly address those concerns.

As Members are aware, NIW was established as a government-owned company in 2006. It is a statutory trading body owned by central government but operating under company legislation with substantial independence from government. However, following the Executive's decision to defer the introduction of direct domestic water charges, it was designated as a non-departmental public body (NDPB) for public expenditure purposes in March 2009. That designation requires NIW to manage its regulatory funding requirements within public expenditure funding constraints. It was accepted by all those who provided evidence to the Committee that that was not the best governance model. Indeed, the Utility Regulator described it as suboptimal in the price control 13 (PC13) draft determination. Others suggested that it was bureaucratic, did not encourage or allow long-term strategic planning and investment, and removed the incentive to deliver greater efficiencies, as were evident in similar utility providers in England, Scotland and Wales.

The Committee has previously expressed concerns about the governance structure in NI Water. As stated, we are aware that the Minister has submitted an options paper to the Executive for their consideration. The Committee has written to the Minister asking for sight of that, and we are encouraged that the Minister has indicated that it will be forthcoming at the earliest convenience. However, the Committee recommends that the Minister, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues, urgently enter into negotiations with the British Treasury to seek an appropriate designation for NI Water that will remove the negative aspects of the current structure, such as the absence of end-year flexibility, while retaining a high level of accountability to the Department and the Assembly.

I turn now to the issue of wider consultation on the future funding of NIW. While the Bill clearly honours the PFG commitment to no additional domestic charges in this parliamentary mandate, it extends that commitment into the next mandate. From a strategic, regulatory and operational perspective, that has raised concerns among organisations that provided evidence to the Committee. Among other responsibilities, the Utility Regulator sets the level of expenditure for NIW through the price control mechanism, the current determination having been published in December 2012. That determination — PC13 — will run for the period 2013-15 and is based very much on the PFG commitment that the Bill now puts in place.

The next determination will run from 2015 to 2021 and will include one year of direct subsidy, but the remaining period could be one where direct additional domestic charges are applied. Lowering the direct subsidy to NIW below

50% would allow for a reclassification away from that of an NDPB and allow it, for example, to access low-cost investment from banks. That will have a direct impact on the investment and incentivisation available to NIW.

The Committee received a presentation last week from the managing director of Welsh Water and was impressed by the ability of his organisation to raise funds to invest in the utility while keeping operational costs at a low level and reducing the amount charged to customers. The Committee intends taking up an invitation from Welsh Water to visit it, and, on behalf of the Committee, I extend the invitation to the Minister and his officials to accompany us.

NIW has also indicated that, if there were a change to the current Executive policy away from no additional domestic charges, it would require approximately 18 months' restructuring to get to a position where it could effectively and efficiently commence hard charging. The Committee, again mindful that the Executive are considering the options paper, recommends that the debate and consultation on the future structure of NIW is commenced as early in the process as possible to allow informed decisions to be made and to allow for the development and scrutiny of appropriate Executive and departmental policies. Obviously, the Committee will wish to have a central role in that consultation.

The Committee is supportive of the Bill. It delivers against the Programme for Government priority 2 commitment.

Mr Easton: I welcome and fully support the Final Stage of the Bill, and I congratulate the Minister on steering it through.

I intend to be very brief. I welcome the minor technicality that allows water and sewerage undertakers to record their intention to carry out certain works on private land on the statutory charge register, which is held by the Land Registry. That will allow potential buyers of land to be informed if the land is affected by certain statutory restrictions. That is worthwhile to help protect people when purchasing land.

I also welcome the fact that there will be no water charges over the next three-year period until 2016, when we will have another look at it. Although that move will cost the Assembly £282 million in subsidies, I feel that, when weighed against the potential suffering of those who can least afford it, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Mr Dallat: As a member of the Regional Development Committee, I, too, support the Final Stage of the Bill. I want to record my thanks to the Clerk and to the other members of the Committee for the teamwork that was demonstrated during the discussion.

I certainly, if you will pardon the pun, do not wish to pour cold water on the Bill in any way, but it is a temporary arrangement that does not face up to the fact that we have an industry that is badly in need of reform. Historically, the industry suffered from underinvestment, particularly during the dark days of the Troubles, when money was diverted to other needs. Of course, in more recent times, the industry has featured in the public eye for all the wrong reasons.

Returning to the Bill, in the longer term, there has to be greater accountability and continuous reinvestment so that we provide the highest quality of water and protect the environment with the best means of dealing with sewage disposal. Most importantly, we need to avoid infraction of European regulations that will increasingly come into being. We certainly do not wish to stack up difficulties for a future generation of the Assembly — speaking positively, of course, and assuming that there will be one.

Nailing our colours to the mast — if it is all right to use that term — the SDLP believes that a mutual society is the best option. The Deputy Chairperson referred to the Welsh model when we had someone addressing us last week, which came pretty close to that model. We particularly like that because it would give ordinary people a real say in the running of the water service. It would mean that it would be accountable, and, without wishing to stray too far away, let us say that the co-operative model is experiencing growth at the moment, creating jobs and giving real ownership back to ordinary people. It would be an awful pity to miss opportunities such as that, and I am sure that the Minister will give thought to that. Certainly, we do not want to move towards privatisation — I do not think that anybody in the Assembly particularly wants that — but the Bill cannot be seen simply as a "get me out of jail" ticket to avoid hard decisions in the future.

I finish by saying that supporting mutuality as a concept for the future does not necessarily mean direct water charges. It simply means that you have a mechanism that gives people a real say in the future of what I think is the most important industry, not only to private people but to commercial enterprises that pay for their water and are experiencing great difficulty in meeting those Bills. On that note, I welcome the Bill, I welcome the co-operation of the Minister in the discussions that we have had. I hope that we will continue to work hard to achieve a model that will be perfect for Northern Ireland and perfect for its people.

10.45 am

Mr Swann: On behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, I support the Final Stage of the Bill. I am speaking in place of my colleague Ross Hussey, my party's representative on the Regional Development Committee. Regrettably, he is unable to attend today due to other important business.

It is an important debate because it honours a clear manifesto commitment that we in the Ulster Unionist Party gave at the last election. It is an important debate because it reassures hard-working families that they will not have to worry about separate or additional water charging during this Assembly term. People across Northern Ireland who are worried about their heating bills, fuel bills, the rising cost of food and essentials and even about making their rent or mortgage payments can be reassured that they will not have to worry again about separate or additional water charging bills during this Assembly term. In the current difficult economic climate, working families have enough to worry about with Minister McCausland's Welfare Reform Bill, if it is passed unamended, but they will not have to worry about water bills.

I pay tribute to the Minister, my party colleague Danny Kennedy, for securing full Executive support for this measure in the Programme for Government, which was, ultimately, voted for all parties and supported by all parties. Even the Alliance Party, which in its manifesto said that it intended to put more pressure on households and saddling working families with another bill, seemed to have little issue in the end supporting this Bill. That is a bit like their friends, the Lib Dems, who campaigned on tuition fees, only to do a U-turn when they got a whiff of government. Of course, there are those who currently pay water charges:

our families, our farmers and our businesses. They too feel the pressure of price rises in electricity and gas. They are enterprises that provide important sources of employment, and they need some good news too.

There are challenges about the future governance of water in Northern Ireland and the direction that things may take during the lifetime of the next Assembly. This significant Bill gives time and space for parties to work together to build some form of consensus on the much long-term way forward. Pause for thought on where Northern Ireland Water was just over two years ago. We had the big freeze and a genuine and serious water crisis. Who could forget the events that ruined Christmas and the new year period for so many? Only a few months later, the current Minister took over, and we have witnessed what a steadying influence he has been on the water service. We are all aware of the continually improving statistics and improving levels of service. The Bill is consistent in that drive for stability, certainty and the provision of foundations on which to explore long-term options and governance models.

It is sometimes said that good things come in small packages, and I do not disagree with that. This Bill demonstrates that, in legislation, a short Bill can go a long way in improving the lot for households right across Northern Ireland. For that reason, the Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the Bill.

Mr Dickson: I support the Bill in its Final Stage. Despite my reservations, I respect the fact that the Assembly and the Executive have agreed a Programme for Government that rules out the introduction of domestic water charges through to April 2015. I am sure that the Ulster Unionists will also respect that Programme for Government and this Assembly when it comes to the Welfare Reform Bill.

Throughout the legislative process, I have stressed the need to reconsider the post-2015 period and questioned the wisdom of extending the subsidy as far as 2016. However, as time dragged on, it became clear that, even if we were able to agree on alternative arrangements, Northern Ireland Water would not have enough time to implement them before the end of the mandate. This legislation, quite frankly, was introduced far too late for us to do anything about the governance and financial difficulties faced by Northern Ireland Water. It is regrettable and shameful that no consideration was given to those issues, even in parallel with the legislative process. It is disgraceful that the Regional Development Committee and the Assembly have been asked to consider and approve a Bill with absolutely no idea of what the Minister has planned for the future of Northern Ireland Water. We are signing off on hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure without any meaningful debate or discussion about the future of our water system. We have to pass the Bill today because we have no alternative, as successive Ministers have failed to face up to the reality that the current arrangements are unsustainable. This legislation is another sticking plaster, put on with no idea how we are going to heal the wound.

The Committee has at least tried to get the discussion under way, as others have said. Indeed, last week, we heard from Welsh Water, which operates a model similar to that which the Alliance Party has been advocating for years. Most importantly, its chief executive, Nigel Annett, stressed the importance of a revenue stream independent of government that provides security and, crucially for our water system, allows for long-term planning. Importantly, charging at Welsh Water is linked to the social security system in order to identify households that require discounts. That contrasts sharply with the arrangements here in Northern Ireland, which subsidise the cost of water to the richest in our society while diverting hundreds of millions of pounds away from the public services on which the most vulnerable depend.

As I have said time and again, charging is necessary, but we need to make sure that any charging arrangements are not only fair but transparent and designed to protect the most vulnerable people. Those are issues which we need to consider urgently. We cannot afford any more sticking plasters. Minister, we need to start that discussion now; not in three months, six months or a year's time. We need it now. So I urge you and your Department to engage immediately with the Committee and the Assembly to find a fair and sustainable solution for the people of Northern Ireland.

Perhaps, when the Finance Minister, during the Budget debate, described my call for charging as brave, that signalled the entry of realism into the debate that needs to start now.

Mr Spratt: I apologise to the House and to the Minister for not being here at start of the debate. I had a medical appointment this morning.

I want to be brief in what I have to say as Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee. We have debated the Bill fully, as the Minister and the Department know, and I appreciate the co-operation of the members, the Committee Clerk and the officials of the Committee in relation to that.

I thank the Deputy Chairperson for presenting the Committee's view, and I just want to reiterate couple of points made by him. There was consensus in the Committee on the presentation given by Welsh Water. I know that there has been further debate outside my Committee on the same presentation, which was given to another Assembly Committee on the same day. There is merit in looking at that model and examining it for the future. I reiterate the Deputy Chair's invitation to the Minister and some officials from the Department. We had a worthwhile trip in relation to rapid transit, and this is another area in which some good ideas could be created. It merits examination.

Let me also say briefly, with regard to Mr Swann's remarks on giving time and space to parties in relation to the Bill, that the vast majority of members of the Committee want time and space and believe that there should now be an examination of this whole area, not a rushed process but one that will take some time to see what is best for the Executive and, indeed, more importantly, the people of Northern Ireland. He mentioned where Northern Ireland Water had been a couple of years ago. In the week that the present chief executive has announced that he will retire from Northern Ireland Water in August, it is important to put on record his very valuable contribution over the past two or three years in bringing Northern Ireland Water back to being some sort of a well-respected organisation. He has done a lot to address the problems that existed with staffing and all of that in the organisation. So, we need to pay tribute to him and the work that he has done.

Finally, I thank the DRD officials for their help during the entire process. It was a short Bill. Short is good, some people say, but it was well worth it, and we had a good and worthwhile debate in Committee. I have no hesitation in supporting the views of my Committee on the Bill.

Mr Kennedy: I thank all Members who contributed to today's debate. I am pleased at the widespread support given by Members to the Bill.

The Bill makes good our commitment not to introduce additional household water charges during the current mandate. It does not and should not seek to address longer-term policy issues about how water and sewerage services should be governed in Northern Ireland. It is right that those questions are of interest to the Assembly and are the subject of much debate, but they are beyond the scope of the Bill. The current legislation that enables a subsidy to be paid to NI Water on behalf of customers will expire on 31 March this year. If the Executive's decision not to introduce additional water charges is to be implemented, it is essential that the legislation progresses.

Looking forward long term, the Executive have agreed with my recommendation that funding and governance arrangements for water and sewerage services should be remitted to the Budget review group. Many of the issues are cross-cutting, and this is a sensible approach designed to ensure mature debate.

I note the Committee's recommendation on discussions with Her Majesty's Treasury, which was outlined by the Deputy Chair. However, as an example of the cross-cutting nature of the area, it would be the Finance Minister who would engage Her Majesty's Treasury for discussion, not me as Minister for Regional Development. However, again, that would have to be done on the basis of consensus.

I want to encourage engagement, I want to help build consensus, and I want to work to address the acknowledged shortcomings of the current arrangements. NI Water's ongoing dual status as a non-departmental public body and a government-owned company is not a permanent solution, because it is not sustainable in the long term. I am conscious that we need to continue to take stock and to bear in mind the fact that we have provided stability to NI Water. I join the Committee Chairman in his comments in respect of the chief executive of NI Water, Trevor Haslett, who has provided considerable stability to NI Water. We can all remember where we were three winters ago with the freeze/thaw.

We now need to work together and take a measured look at the long-term issues and apply our minds collectively to developing a range of potential solutions. In the interim, I have urged stakeholders in the water sector to make the current arrangements work as well as they can. That has been a backdrop to NI Water delivering on efficiency targets, producing the highest levels of drinking water quality and waste water treatment and improving customer service. I commend the company for those achievements under arrangements that are short of ideal.

11.00 am

I will quickly address some points that were raised by Members. The Deputy Chair welcomed the Bill. Appropriate scrutiny was given to the Bill. Like him, I welcome the PC13 and the outcome that we have been able to achieve there. That gives further stability to the position of NI Water.

The Deputy Chair and, indeed, the Chairman of the Committee, in his later contribution, raised the issue of the invitation to me to accompany the Committee and officials with my departmental officials to Wales to see at first hand that operation. I can confirm that, approximately a year ago, I had discussions with the chief executive of Welsh Water. I am aware of that as an option. It is one option. I hesitate to accept the invite at this point because I would like to have at least preliminary discussions with the Budget review group in advance of sampling other models. There are other models out there, but I will carefully consider the invitation that has been provided.

Mr Easton supported the Bill, and I am grateful for that. I largely agree with Mr Dallat's comments: we have to maintain the quality of our water. He indicated his solution based on mutuality and not privatisation, but he indicated a desire that we work together. Again, I welcome that. Robin Swann made a significant contribution in which he was very generous to me, as I would expect. In trying to show an attractive modesty, I can honestly say that what he said was absolutely correct.

Mr Dickson supported the Bill despite his reservations. I take the point about a sticking plaster etc. It is not a sticking plaster. I remind the Member that this will be an Executive decision as we move forward. This will create the opportunity in the Budget review group to carry forward consideration of all the issues. The issues are not without their challenges, so I hope that, through the Budget review group initially and the Regional Development Committee and the Assembly, we can make progress on all these matters.

I welcome Mr Spratt to his position again. I thank him for the contribution that he made and for his broad support for the Bill. As Members are aware, the Budget review group's considerations are at a very early stage. I will be glad to report to the Assembly on any proposals that we agree, but, as I have said, that is for another debate.

Today, we have the opportunity to move forward on this Bill, which implements agreed Executive policy, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/11-15] do now pass.

Criminal Justice Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will be aware that the Minister of Justice has advised in correspondence to Members that he is not in a position to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill today. However, as it stands on the Order Paper, the item of business must be formally disposed of.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I regret that Executive clearance has not been given to amendments that I intended to propose, and, therefore, the stage is not moved.

Not moved.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The item has not been moved, and, that being the case, the next item of business is Question Time. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2·00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 11.05 am.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Questions 2, 5, 7 and 9 have been withdrawn, and questions 2, 5 and 9 require written answers.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

1. **Mr Brady** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the sexual orientation strategy. *(AQO 3545/11-15)*

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

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): We remain committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. A consultation document that will inform public consultation on the strategy, is currently under consideration in the Department. A sexual orientation strategy will be published once the consultation process has been completed. Our officials continue to engage with the sector on a regular basis to update it on the development of the consultation document.

Mr Brady: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Will he explain what is holding the strategy back, considering that the First Minister told the Chamber three times in the past year that the final strategy would be completed and published by the end of 2012? Will he comment on reports from the LGBT sector that his party — the DUP — has been dragging its feet —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Brady: — on the publication of a credible sexual orientation strategy for a number of years and is hostile to the sector receiving equality of treatment?

Mr Bell: I can address that in reverse order. The Member read his question very well, but I am not hostile to any human being. I believe that all human beings, regardless of the colour of their skin, their age, their sex, their sexual orientation or their political persuasion, should be treated with the innate dignity that comes with human rights and human worth.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) remains committed to publishing a sexual orientation strategy. Junior Ministers and OFMDFM officials continue to engage with the sector and with members of the forum.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mike Nesbitt, I remind Members that, as far as possible, they should not be seen reading out supplementary questions.

Mr Nesbitt: What was I going to say? *[Laughter.]* I thank the Minister for his answers to date. He said twice that officials were engaging with the sector. Does he agree

with the Rainbow Project, which believes that setting up a consultative group to advise on drafting is the way forward?

Mr Bell: We engage with the strategy that we have. I have met members of the sector, including the group that has been represented, and we will continue to engage, take their views and seek agreement so that we could have a coherent strategy to go forward.

Mr Craig: Will the Minister confirm that any sexual orientation strategy will not create additional rights but merely be a reiteration of all existing rights?

Mr Bell: Yes, I think that I can. I have said constantly in the House that we believe in the innate dignity and human worth of every human being. I will restate what I have said to the Member previously: I do not think that we would be in a position to support any new or additional rights or responsibilities.

Mr Eastwood: We have been talking about a strategy that is long overdue. Another commitment is long overdue — 15 years overdue, I think — and that is the bill of rights for Northern Ireland. Can I ask —

Mr Speaker: Order. That was a good try, but the Member will know, as he is long enough in the Chamber, that the question must relate, as far as possible, to the original question.

Mr McCarthy: The junior Minister will have seen the frustration in the Chamber about the delay on this issue. Will he give the Assembly a firm commitment on a date on which the strategy will be published?

Mr Bell: We will continue to seek agreement on a coherent strategy to take forward. In the meantime, we have spoken out constantly against any form of abuse against anybody's values, orientation or skin colour. We will continue to reaffirm the innate dignity and worth of every human being.

Mr Speaker: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes

3. **Mr Weir** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Delivering Social Change signature projects. *(AQO 3547/11-15)*

4. **Mr McClarty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the six signature programmes under the Delivering Social Change framework announced in October 2012. *(AQO 3548/11-15)*

11. **Mr McAleer** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the key signature projects announced in October 2012. *(AQO 3555/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I would like to take questions 3, 4 and 11 together.

On 10 October 2012, the deputy First Minister and I announced six significant signature programmes to the value of £26 million under the Delivering Social Change framework. The programmes are designed to tackle multigenerational poverty and to improve children's health and well-being, and educational and life opportunities. Work on the implementation of the programmes is ongoing. In January 2013, our officials met each of the senior officials tasked by the relevant Minister to deliver progress and expedite delivery. Further discussions with key officials in the lead Departments also took place last month. Close discussions are continuing to ensure delivery at the earliest opportunity.

I am confident that, for the most part, work on all the signature programmes is progressing as quickly and efficiently as is possible to ensure effective delivery. The Delivering Social Change framework aims to change the way in which Departments have traditionally worked. We want to ensure that Departments work in an effective, joined-up way. The new approach is challenging to some Departments and officials. Criticism has been levelled at the Department of Education about the time taken to deliver the numeracy and literacy scheme. We have spoken to the Minister of Education and officials and have made it clear that we want the teachers recruited prior to the summer and ready well in advance of the new academic year.

Mr Weir: I thank the First Minister for his response. He referred to the signature project and the employment of 230 teachers. As there seems to be uncertainty from the Department of Education about when those teachers will be employed and it is unclear how they will be employed, will the First Minister bring clarity on those two subjects? How and when will the additional teachers be employed?

Mr P Robinson: I hope that the "when" will be as I have stated and the teachers will be employed well in advance of September. Needless to say, it would have been much better from our point of view had it been possible to do that earlier. We recognise that what we do with Delivering Social Change will add a feature to what the Department already does. Therefore, there is added value with the programme as we have set it out. The deputy First Minister and I made it fairly clear in our announcement that we would like to see the scheme going forward through one-to-one tutoring on the basis that presently unemployed teachers would take up those posts and, indeed, that they should be assigned to pupils, as opposed to schools. We fear that, if they were assigned to schools, they might be taken up with the work of the schools as opposed to concentrating specifically on the young people who are lagging behind.

That is the scheme as we outlined it. It was endorsed unanimously by the Executive. Of course, it will be taken forward by the Department of Education. Obviously, we have to fit in to whatever employment law requires us to do, so there are issues about that that we have to look at. The Department will raise issues, none of which, in my view, is so difficult to overcome that we should not be able to meet the kind of timetable that I have now set out.

Mr McClarty: I thank the First Minister for his responses so far. How do the First Minister and deputy First Minister plan to work with the Minister of Education to address the findings of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report that an unacceptable number of young people leave school having failed to attain minimal levels of literacy and numeracy?

Mr P Robinson: The very reason that we brought forward our Delivering Social Change programme is that we recognise that there has been multigenerational disadvantage in many fields, not just in education. Whether it is in health and well-being — in some cases, how long you will live is determined on the basis of your

postal code — or in educational achievement, which is determined by the level of disadvantage in the area that you come from, we believe that there should be a policy in place that addresses those issues. Each Department has programmes going forward to address those issues. What we are saying is that we do not believe that what is presently happening is all the answer, and we are putting in place a programme that gives additional value and attempts to address the very issue that the Member has outlined.

Sending 230 teachers into schools to see pupils who have fallen behind and are lagging behind as they approach exams is an excellent way of trying to lift people up and give them a better opportunity to make sure that they meet the necessary standards. I have much confidence in the education system in Northern Ireland, but parts of it are failing. We should concentrate on the parts that are failing rather than trying to change the parts that have been successful.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister tell us how many of the 10 additional family support hubs have been established with the £3 million that was allocated to signature projects last October?

Mr P Robinson: All the lead Departments have been asked to bring forward their schemes for each of the issues. Whether it is the 10 family support hubs, the parenting support groups, the incubation hubs or some of the other measures that were contained in that statement, each of the Ministers will bring forward their proposals for how we move forward.

The family hubs are intended to deal with probably about 3,000 children. It is important that that scheme is put in place and that we have the best possible mechanisms to ensure that we get real value. As well as the family hubs, we, of course, have the proposals to deal with assistance for parenting. All that shows the joined-up nature of Delivering Social Change, as it deals with families, parenting skills and primary and secondary education in fitting pupils for the future, on into improvement in skills and into the local areas, where we have incubation units to try to improve the opportunity for employment in those areas.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the First Minister provide an update on the social economy hubs? Will they be in situ before the end of the mandate, and are the local councils buying into them?

Mr P Robinson: There is a difficulty — I hope that it simply slows down progress rather than making it impossible — and it centres on the issue of attracting people to give us two-year leases for these kinds of proposals. I discussed this recently with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and suggested that it might be worth taking forward the proposition that, where there is not a lease, support should be given to landlords to improve their properties along the lines of an agreement to meet the criteria set out in our statement. If it is difficult for people to find a way forward on the basis of getting two-year leases for a significant number of properties, there are other mechanisms that we should try.

Mrs Cochrane: What consideration has been given to extending the remit of additional teachers for numeracy and literacy to include basic computing skills, as that could further build on the efforts to ensure that young people are equipped for emerging sectors?

Mr P Robinson: We can look at that, but the basic requirements are for numeracy and literacy. Do not forget that what we propose is additional to what is presently on offer, and there are considerable opportunities in IT skills with the present curriculum. So, there are opportunities at present that should be fully taken up. Indeed, outside the education system itself, there are further IT opportunities in many community organisations. So, I am happy to see how we succeed in improving the levels of numeracy and literacy under the pilot that we are operating and whether we can extend that further for young people. Do not forget that this is only one element of it. It is not just about young people who are disadvantaged. Therefore, the Delivering Social Change policy goes beyond that. Perhaps there are more relevant purposes for making IT skills available beyond the education age to those in later life. We can consider that when we look at the next tranche of Delivering Social Change.

2.15 pm

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been answered, and question 5 has been withdrawn.

EU Competitive Funding

6. **Mr G Robinson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government commitment to a 20% increase in EU competitive funding drawdown in this comprehensive spending review period. *(AQO 3550/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: We continue to make good progress towards meeting the 20% target over the four-year Budget period. In 2011-12, which was year 1, we drew down some £15·8 million. We hope to secure an additional £13·5 million of funding this year. On the basis of the baseline calculated over a year ago, we would have been ahead of our target at this time. However, following late notification of drawdown by the Department of Education, we have initiated a mid-term revalidation of the figures supplied by all Departments, taking the opportunity to ensure that they are robust and comprehensive. Although that exercise is ongoing and definitive figures are not yet available, we anticipate that the 2010-11 baseline and hence the amount of additional funding to be delivered under the target will increase. The 20% target will, however, stand, and progress against the more challenging commitment will continue to be monitored and validated by the Programme for Government central team and the delivery oversight group chaired by the head of the Civil Service.

Mr G Robinson: How will the additional drawdown notified late by the Department of Education impact on the 20% target under the Programme for Government?

Mr P Robinson: That might be a bit complex, to the extent that there are more issues than just the Department of Education's late notification. Clearly, if, over a year after we sought the figure, a Department has not provided us with the drawdown that it had on the baseline year, it means that not only does the figure that we have to accomplish increase by the amount that it has not provided us with but it has to increase by 20% above that. That is because of our intention to increase by 20%. I am not sure of the exact figures; we will leave that to time to determine. However, we believe that it requires us to be able to draw down a further £5 million or thereabouts.

There is another factor, in that the foreign exchange rates have changed for the euro and the pound. That might have a helpful impact. However, it still seems likely that we will need to find probably an extra £5 million above what we had determined the target would be. We still believe that we can reach that target. It was challenging in the first place, and it has got a bit more challenging as time has gone on. However, I think that there is greater understanding in the Departments of the importance for them not just of attempting to draw down funds but of encouraging others to do so, particularly in framework programme 7 or its new mode of Horizon 2020.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister update us on progress in maximising the opportunities presented by the Irish presidency of the EU?

Mr P Robinson: Even without the Irish presidency of the EU, we had recognised that our change from being an objective 1 area to an area that had to fight competitively for funds left us in a position where we perhaps had not all the skills in government that the Government of the Irish Republic had. They have been very helpful in allowing us to second members of our staff to their European unit so that we can pick up some of the tricks of the trade. They have been very successful in drawdown.

In relation to the Irish presidency, we have an arrangement with the Irish Government that we will have people from our Civil Service involved as the presidency moves forward. That helps them to build up networks, make contacts and see how things are done. Hopefully, the end result of all those put together will be a higher drawdown for Northern Ireland.

Mr Byrne: I thank the First Minister for his answers. Will he give any indication of the future expected drawdown of R&D moneys, given that we have been very slow in the past to maximise that potential?

Mr P Robinson: It is for that reason that we have set challenging targets to each Department. I do not envisage us saying at the end of this Programme for Government period that we have done well to achieve the 20% increase. I suspect that we will say that we want an increase on that increased figure. We will continue to push and stretch Departments.

Northern Ireland has a fantastic reputation for research and development. There are massive opportunities out there. There has been a tendency in the past to look at Europe as a difficult place to put in applications. We have put in place staff in our Brussels office to help with that process. We have Departments that are now more acquainted with how to improve their applications and make them more worthy of support. The conversations that the deputy First Minister and I have had with the president of the Council, the president of the Parliament and the commissioners have resulted in full support from them for Northern Ireland being able to increase, as the Barroso task force encouraged us to, the amount of drawdown that we receive.

Mr Kinahan: Does the First Minister agree that the next round of Peace funds should be utilised to tackle the challenges that still exist in intergenerational educational underachievement?

Mr P Robinson: We are very fortunate that we have succeeded in having Peace IV provision included in the present European budget, which is at draft stage and still has to be approved by the Parliament. I remember that, when we completed Peace II, people doubted whether we could get a third intervention from Europe. It now looks as if we will succeed in getting a fourth. I welcome the combined approach that has been taken by the Northern Ireland MEPs in arguing the case for a fourth tranche of that fund. The deputy First Minister and I, along with the junior Ministers, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and others, have been out in Europe arguing that case. Although it is currently designated to be €150 million, which is slightly less than previously, it is a lot more than we had expected to get.

How will it be best used? We have some influence but no control over what Europe will eventually decide. Many of us consider reconciliation to be an area that is appropriate for the European Union to look at for peace funding for Northern Ireland. There are a number of good causes. The difficulty is that there are more good causes than there is money available to fund them properly. The more that are included in the European Union's assessment, the more divided the funds will be and the less they will have an impact in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Older People's Strategy

8. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the strategy for older people. *(AQO 3552/11-15)*

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell: The new draft active ageing strategy was extensively reworked during 2012 following the feedback from the ageing strategy advisory group, which was chaired by Claire Keatinge, the Commissioner for Older People. The advisory group provided very helpful feedback on the content of the current draft strategy and provided comments on the draft early actions plan that has been developed to implement the strategy. We are grateful to the group for its advice and expertise. Junior Minister McCann and I met Claire Keatinge and representatives from the age sector to discuss the development of the strategy. It highlights the key issues facing older people here. It will be implemented through the Delivering Social Change framework with a focus on what Departments can do to add to existing work to make a strategic change to services or programmes for older people.

The specific scope of the Delivering Social Change signature programmes, their associated targets and reporting mechanisms are currently the focus of discussion in all Departments. Once they are finalised, we will have a strategy and an early actions plan, the content of which, I am delighted to say, has been strongly influenced by older people and those who work closely with them. We hope to be in a position to launch the consultation for the strategy in late March or early April. It will take account of the views of older people, their representatives and, importantly, those who care for them.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. Will he assure the House that, in line with international practice, legislation on goods, facilities and services for over-18s will be implemented without delay?

Mr Bell: Yes. Anti-discrimination legalisation in relation to age is currently limited to the fields of employment, vocational training and further and higher education.

In answering the earlier question, I should have said that, following consultation and analysis, the final strategy will be published in the autumn of 2013.

The Programme for Government committed us to extending age discrimination legislation to the provision of goods, facilities and services. That will require new legislation to be taken through the Assembly. Prior to a new Bill being introduced in the Assembly, a considerable number of steps have to be taken to ensure that the legislation achieves the intended outcome. That will involve a period of detailed policy development, and we are at that stage now.

In Britain, the Equality Act 2010 provisions banning age discrimination against over-18-year-olds in the provision of goods, facilities and services and public functions came into operation on 1 October 2012. In July 2008, the European Commission issued a draft anti-discrimination directive that included protection in the provision of goods, facilities and services on the grounds of age. I understand that that is currently stalled in the Council.

Comparative analysis is also being undertaken to determine how other jurisdictions, such as Australia and Canada, which have age goods, facilities and services legislation in place, have made provision for all ages. That will inform our consideration of the scope of the legislation that we will introduce.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is useful that the junior Minister mentioned the position of children and young people. He has practically answered the question that I was going to ask.

Minister, you mentioned that the issue was stalled in the Council. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr Bell: I am not privy to the internal work of the Council. My understanding is that, in 2008, the European Commission issued the draft directive, which included a provision for protection in the provision of goods, facilities and service on the grounds of age. I am not sure what the current circumstances are, but we can certainly ask and seek to provide that information to you.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the improved level of consultation that has been used in the strategy. Perhaps we could consider using that method for other strategies.

Does the junior Minister agree with the assessment that there is a benign prejudice against older people in our society? How does he hope that the strategy will tackle that prejudice?

Mr Bell: Many older people's groups have told us that they are delighted with the work that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister did, not only in establishing a commissioner but in establishing a commissioner with considerable teeth in the work that she does and what she can call in to examine. I have also spoken to the Pensioners Parliament, and I want to pay a considerable tribute to older people. After all, they are the people who made this society. I have also talked to groups about childcare, and we see a continued reliance on grandparents, who do an excellent job in shaping the lives of children.

Issues such as travel insurance are of concern to me and, I think, to the Member. We are particularly concerned about what healthy older people are asked to pay for travel insurance simply on the grounds of their age. Northern Ireland overwhelmingly recognises the contribution that our older people make to our society, and the two words that I would say to that older generation would be, "Thank you".

2.30 pm

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Speaker: Questions 2 and 11 have been withdrawn.

Strangford Lough: Modiolus Mussels

1. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on actions taken to address the problem of the depletion of modiolus in Strangford lough. *(AQO 3560/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Modiolus modiolus, or horse mussel, biogenic reefs are a designated feature of the Strangford lough special area of conservation and are in an unfavourable condition. We are therefore required to restore the feature.

My Department shares responsibility for the restoration of these reefs with the Department of the Environment (DOE). My officials met the European Commission in April 2012 and informally accepted a number of actions that the Commission felt necessary to address responsibilities under the habitats directive for the protection and restoration of modiolus in Strangford lough. Those included the strict protection of the larger area of the lough that contains the remaining intact modiolus biogenic reef.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the DOE responded to the Strangford modiolus infringement pilot case by way of a letter on 18 May 2012 to the Ulster Wildlife Trust, addressing the Commission's concerns and outlining proposals for modiolus restoration and the management of fishing activity on the lough. The proposed measures were described in more detail in a revised restoration plan that was sent to the Commission on 11 October 2012, and we await the Commission's formal response to those proposals.

In advance of receiving the Commission's decision, my Department has recently completed a habitats regulations assessment on pot fishing and aquaculture in Strangford lough, and on 8 January 2013, we introduced further restrictions on pot fishing by introducing two fishing exclusion zones in areas where restoration of modiolus beds is a priority. This legislation has been introduced as a result of discussions with Commission officials that indicated that this would be the minimum requirement acceptable to the Commission in respect of safeguarding and restoring the designated modiolus feature. In addition, the DOE has introduced by-laws regulating anchoring, mooring and diving.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive response. What sort of dialogue has the Department had in the last while with the fishing industry in the area?

Mrs O'Neill: I have met the fishermen on a number of occasions, particularly around the response that we were to submit to Europe, because their livelihoods are impacted by any decisions that we take. I listened carefully to the Assembly debate last year, when the consensus in the House was that the impact on the livelihoods of those fishermen meant that there needed to be a proportionate response to the environmental issue. So I met them a number of times in the run-up to our submitting information to the Commission.

There is also ongoing engagement at official level with the fishing community. However, it is important that we continue to engage with them, particularly after we receive the formal confirmation from the Commission that it accepts our proposals, because that is when we can decide on the way forward and see whether any other roles for those fishermen can be explored.

Mrs D Kelly: What form will further discussions with fishing industry stakeholders take, and are any contingencies or other plans or avenues being explored to improve the fishing industry's income?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for the question. As I said, it is important that we wait for the formal acceptance from Europe of our plans, which we believe to be at least the minimum that Europe will accept. The fact that we have had to expand the area that is closed to pot fishing means that fishermen will be displaced, and that must be seriously considered. I intend to meet the fishermen to discuss that, on the back of the plans. More science is needed, and among the suggestions brought forward is one that fishermen may have a role in providing it. There is some scope to explore the potential for people who will be displaced.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that. Will she inform us whether there has been any memorandum of understanding between her Department and the Department of the Environment in relation to the outworkings of any proposals that may come forward, and, if so, what are the details of such a memorandum of understanding?

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm to the Member that, because both my Department and DOE are impacted upon, we are working very closely on the issue. Drawing up the management plans and the proposals to be put to Europe was a joint piece of work. Queen's University carried out a large and comprehensive piece of scientific research and reported it to me and the Environment Minister back in July 2011. That is what we drew the enhanced plan from. That is what we have used as evidence to back it up.

We will continue to work very closely with DOE on that issue. DOE has actually brought forward by-laws on anchoring and mooring, as I said in the original answer, because we need to look at all of the factors that impact on pot fishing and the area that I look after. DOE also needs to bring forward the legislation — which it has done — that looks at protecting the lough and the long-term future sustainability of the lough.

Mr Speaker: Question No 2 has been withdrawn.

Flooding: Greater Belfast

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what additional resources her Department has made available to the Rivers Agency to address flooding in greater Belfast. *(AQO 3562/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: During the flooding in June 2012, staff from across the agency were diverted to provide assistance to those affected across greater Belfast. Considerable resources, including contractors, were then provided to remove blockages to the drainage network and repair infrastructure. Following investigations into the causes of flooding, works have already been carried out and further works are planned for the coming financial year. Rivers Agency is also taking over the maintenance of and responsibility for a number of watercourses that contributed to the flooding. In co-operation with councils, additional sandbag storage facilities have also been provided.

I have already made additional funding available for flood alleviation works in the greater Belfast area this year, and I have allocated £2·5 million and £3·5 million respectively over the next 2 financial years for flood alleviation works in east Belfast. Improvements to the drainage network will continue to be a priority, and in order to deliver those, recruitment of additional staff for the greater Belfast area is also being undertaken.

I am very aware of the distress and hardship caused by flooding and the concerns that many homeowners have in regard to home insurance. As recently as 31 January this year, I, along with public representatives and Rivers Agency officials, visited an area in Finaghy to see at first hand what actions are being undertaken to reduce any further risk of flooding. As requested at that meeting, a commitment was given to residents that I would provide them with a letter of comfort, which they could use in discussions with their insurance companies in respect of the works that are planned for 2013-14. I can confirm that that was issued to those residents.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the Rivers Agency is under-resourced, especially for addressing risk areas that were highlighted last year during the floods?

Mrs O'Neill: No one could have predicted the heavy rainfall that occurred in June 2012, which, I assume, is the incident that you are referring to. I do not think that any plan in place would have been able to mitigate the results of that particularly heavy rain, although that is one of recommendations of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) report, and the Executive are actively looking at that.

As I said, I have actually recruited extra staff for the work that will be done in the greater Belfast area. I think that we have four new members of staff, who will come on board to be involved in the regular inspection of drains and making sure that culverts are not blocked. That, in itself, is a help to Rivers Agency in that area. Funding for flood alleviation is always going to be prioritised based on level of risk to people and property and the associated costs and benefits of providing the flood alleviation measures. I hope that the Member is somewhat assured that we actually have employed extra staff for the Belfast area.

Mr McDevitt: I acknowledge the Minister's visit to Finaghy at the end of January. I am sure that, when she was there, she will have heard that the underlying issue in most of the city is the question of so-called undesignated waterways — culverts that were laid informally over the past 100 years and that belong to nobody. What steps does the Minister intend to take to progressively bring undesignated waterways under the control of the Rivers Agency so that we do not ever have to walk through the mud again?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that there is a role for the Drainage Council in the designation of water courses. There are criteria in place. Anybody can apply to have a watercourse designated. I regularly receive correspondence from Members who feel that particular watercourses should be designated. It is something that we should explore further when we are looking at new legislation on flooding over the next number of years. We should return to the designation criteria that are currently being used. Suffice to say, the criteria are there for a reason. They are there to prioritise works that need to be done.

As regards my visit to south Belfast, it is clear that a combination of issues need to be dealt with. A combination of agencies need to work together. I am confident that the Rivers Agency is playing its role in working with the other agencies.

Mr Copeland: I begin by thanking the Minister for her very prompt responses to one or two communications about flooding that I sent to her office. She may recall one in which I discussed the possibility of a grants scheme or advanced loan scheme for the residents of homes that are flooded most continually. That would be paid, by agreement, directly to companies that could install flood protection systems. Have you given any further thought to these matters? If so, where are we with them?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I listened to the case that he put forward. I met a number of people who also believe that that is the way to go. In fact, the Rivers Agency is looking at that as an option. While I cannot be any more positive on that option at this stage, I am exploring it. It is a genuine avenue that could be explored. It would not be a simple process, as there would obviously be all sorts of procurement issues to deal with, but the Rivers Agency is actively looking at it.

Bovine Tuberculosis

4. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with her counterparts in Westminster in relation to the development of a vaccination for cattle to prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis. *(AQO 3563/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: While I have not had any meetings with UK Ministers specifically on the subject of cattle vaccination for bovine TB, I am kept fully informed of developments. My officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales via monthly TB liaison group teleconferences and their counterparts in the South of Ireland. EU Commission legislation prohibits the vaccination of cattle against bovine TB. The use of cattle TB vaccination would interfere with the tuberculin skin test. Any cattle so vaccinated would, therefore, react positively to that test.

Research continues in England into the feasibility of developing such a vaccine and to develop a DIVA test to differentiate between infected and vaccinated animals. Such a test has been developed, but it has not yet been trialled and validated in field conditions. Recent correspondence from Commissioner Borg sets out a time frame for the possible use of a vaccine against bovine TB in the EU. It sets out the series of steps that would need to be undertaken to secure the scientific validation and approvals before any change to the legislative position would be considered to allow cattle vaccination.

We will wish to be certain that any such vaccine that is developed has international acceptance before considering its use here, given the value of our export-dependent trade in livestock and livestock products. We must ensure that our export trade is not compromised as a consequence. Care will have to be taken to avoid trade embargoes on the export of livestock and livestock products. It is also desirable that we have an all-island approach to this issue.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she expand on the work being done to examine a more efficient way of testing for TB given that many farmers believe that the current system is outdated, time-consuming and too costly?

Mrs O'Neill: I think that, when people initially started to talk about vaccination, they thought that it was a miracle cure. However, as you will be aware, TB is a very complicated, multifactorial disease with a number of things that contribute to it. Unfortunately, at this stage, vaccination is not the answer to everything. The Commission is exploring it. It has set out a 10-year plan to get the science right and make sure that it is tested in the field. Only then could we use it.

As I said, it is a very complicated disease. However, as regards what we are doing, I have announced the test and vaccinate or remove (TVR) wildlife intervention research piece. That is very positive and has been broadly welcomed across the board. There are obviously environmental concerns, but I want to assure farmers that we are trying to do everything that we can to make sure that we tackle the disease, look at the factors and take forward the TVR approach that I announced.

Mr Frew: The Minister will be aware of the deep concerns of Dairy UK in Northern Ireland about the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee's review on this very subject. The Minister alluded to the seriousness of this for our export market. Has she any plans to speak to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in light of the EFRA Committee's review to make sure that it is aware of the consequences for the export of milk and milk products if any part of our country cannot vaccinate cattle?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that I will continue to engage with DEFRA on all issues to reflect the needs of our local industry. As I said, there is monthly correspondence between officials, but I regularly engage with DEFRA officials — at least once a month — on general agricultural issues. I will be meeting them again on 18 March, which will be another opportunity for us to have some discussions on those very issues. It is vital that we make sure that we do not disadvantage our local industry from the potential, and, given how reliant we are on the

trade, it is vital that we export. So, I will make sure that we are not disadvantaged in any shape or form.

2.45 pm

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a freagra. Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she give us the latest position on the badger test, vaccinate or remove policy?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I have announced the first badger sett survey, which will take place in an area of 100 square kilometres between Banbridge and Rathfriland. That area has been chosen because it has high badger density, high herd density and high confirmed levels of bovine TB. The second badger sett survey location will be announced in the very near future, and the results of the Food and Environment Research Agency modelling and the badger sett surveys will be important to the design and costings of the TVR wildlife intervention research.

I am quite positive about the fact that we were able to get this announced and that we have it on the ground. There is lots more work to be done, but I know that it has been broadly welcomed across industry. As I said earlier in answer to Mr Frew's question, it is something that has been welcomed, and it is important that we get a balance between looking towards the needs of our farming industry and the fact that badgers are a protected species. So, I think that we have a good balance, and having broad consensus is a positive way to go. I am committed to making sure that we move forward in as effective a manner as possible.

Farm Maps

5. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline how many preliminary farm maps issued in 2013 have been found to contain errors. *(AQO 3564/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The farm maps are first and foremost a control tool that should enable more accurate payments to farmers in a timely way. The positive response of farmers and agricultural consultants across the North in correcting the maps that were issued in January and February has been extremely encouraging and is entirely in line with what the European Commission would expect. That response will be extremely valuable in ensuring more accurate and timely payments later in the year.

Just under 38,000 maps were issued in three batches. The first two batches went out in January without a hitch, but in the third batch, which issued on a minority of maps, there was a technical fault that resulted in 3,560 farm business maps having a significant number of fields missing when compared with the farmer's previous single application form. The underlying data held by the Department were not affected, and the technical problem has been resolved. Those farmers affected will have two additional weeks, until 6 March, to correct the maps.

I have issued a press release advising affected farmers that amended maps are available online and via DARD Direct offices. Additionally, their single application forms will be printed and sent out two weeks later than originally planned to provide additional time to advise of any necessary map adjustments, which can be preprinted along with the updated farmer's report. My Department has written to all affected farmers advising them of that.

Mrs Dobson: This sorry episode is only typical of what we have come to expect from a Department that blunders from one humiliation to another. In any other profession, the Minister and those responsible would have been sacked months ago. Does the Minister agree that those mistakes have had a knock-on impact on all farmers across the Province? Even those whose maps were OK have found it all but impossible to make appointments with their local DARD Direct offices.

Mrs O'Neill: No, I do not agree that it has had a knock-on effect for all farmers. I think that you need to put it in context and not blow it out of proportion. Three sets of maps of over 38,000 maps in total were issued. There was a technical problem with a small number of the third batch, which equated to around 9% of all the maps that were issued. That was unfortunate, but it was identified very quickly. All farmers have been informed and given additional time to complete their paperwork. Also, in case the Member wants to scaremonger again, I assure farmers that no penalties will be applied as a result of mapping issues.

So, it is an ongoing problem. It was fixed very quickly. I am confident that the action was taken very quickly to fix it. So, I do not agree that it has had a knock-on effect on farmers, because it affected only the farmers who received the incorrect maps.

The other point to make is that the underlying data held by the Department still exist: the maps were wrong, but the detail of individual fields is all correct in the system. It was just the maps that were wrong. That was unfortunate, but it has been corrected.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does she accept that this has been another embarrassing fiasco by DARD, and will she agree that it would perhaps have been more advisable to use the good offices of the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, which has a lot of expertise in mapping?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will agree that the major process of remapping 750,000 fields is a very big piece of work. We are doing that to make sure that we meet the Commission standards. We have been on a difficult journey, but I am confident that we are very close to being complete and having maps that are fit for purpose. Next year, when we are fully engaged with the land parcel identification system (LPIS) map and have only one mapping system in place, we will be in a far better position.

You have to put it in context. A small number of maps out of 38,000 maps were affected. Most were perfectly fine, and farmers found them very useful. It is a technical problem. It is unfortunate that it happened, but the problem was rectified within days. Farmers have all been advised of the problem and given extra time to get their maps completed and to get them back in again. I am content that the issues are being dealt with.

Mr Irwin: The Minister can try to dress up the large number of errors in the maps in whatever way she likes, but there were 3,560 in the last batch, and many other maps had errors and had to be rectified by the Department, because, for a number of weeks before that,

farmers were visiting the Department to try to get errors fixed. Will the Minister give an assurance to the House today that enough time will be given to farmers to ensure that the errors are all rectified? The allotted time is not enough.

Mrs O'Neill: No farmer has approached me to say that the extra time is not sufficient. As I said, a large number of maps were perfectly fine. As the Member knows, there are a number of features to consider when you are mapping a field and trying to get maps correct. As I have consistently said, this is a two-way process between the Department and the farmer, and we should work together to get the maps right. We are trying to do that with the new LPIS mapping system next year.

I have allowed extra time for farmers, and, if any farmer approaches me needing extra time, we will work with the farmer to make sure that we get the mapping system right. That is the key. There is £300 million of European moneys available through single farm payments, and we want to make sure that it is drawn down appropriately and that our farmers get the maximum drawdown. Therefore, making sure that the maps are right is the responsibility of both the Department and the farmer.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Shared grazing is causing remapping problems for farmers. What can the Minister and her Department do to help alleviate that problem?

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the issue of shared grazing and that the majority of farmers are able to make the transition to the new mapping arrangements by coming to an understanding with other claimants of their single feed by erecting a permanent barrier. However, I am also aware — it has been raised with me previously — of the concerns of a number of small farmers, because that is proving very difficult for them. I have given an undertaking to farmers that I have discussed the matter with, and I can give an undertaking to the Member that we will look at that, because I want to find a solution for those farmers. It is only a small number, but it is small farmers that are being impacted on, and I want to find a solution for them.

DARD: Headquarters

6. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she can guarantee that relocating her Department's headquarters to Ballykelly is the most desirable option if a business case is not developed for any other site. *(AQO 3565/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: As Members will be aware, the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development headquarters to a rural area is a Programme for Government commitment. Work is well under way to develop a business case, and that will be informed by supporting work on staff surveys, identification of options to accommodate DARD requirements and an assessment of the equality impacts of the decision to move to a rural location. I expect a final decision on the business case by the summer.

The process of deciding on the Ballykelly site involved the consideration of the various Civil Service strategies, including the regional development strategy, which we are mandated to do. A long list of potential locations was taken from the strategy, and each location was then scored against a defined set of objective criteria, which included nine socio-economic factors such as unemployment levels, deprivation and earnings levels, as well as practical considerations such as the number of public sector and Civil Service jobs already sited in the area.

The analysis indicated that the two top local government districts were both in the north-west; namely, Strabane and Limavady. I made my decision to locate to Ballykelly based on two further factors: the availability of the Executive-owned site at Shackleton Barracks and the potential availability of buildings on that site.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Keeping in mind that other locations achieved very similar scores — indeed, one location scored significantly higher — are you saying that the scores do not warrant further scrutiny and assessment?

Mrs O'Neill: I have said very clearly that we had a Programme for Government commitment to move to a rural area. I took the decision based on all of the factors that I have already mentioned and which I mention repeatedly in Question Time in the House and am happy to repeat. We looked at the regional development strategy, which identified that long list that we started off with.

This is all done by an established programme board, which applied the socio-economic criteria and scored accordingly. Two areas in the north-west came out on top, and the fact that Ballykelly is an Executive-owned site means that it is value for money and saves money to the public purse. That in itself was an advantage, as was the potential to use the existing buildings. So the decision was based on all of those criteria, which are transparent and open for everyone to see.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that her Department relocating to Ballykelly is in line with the Bain report on placing public sector jobs throughout Northern Ireland?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with the Member. It will be a significant advantage to the rural location of Ballykelly, given that it will stimulate the local economy. There will be construction, the ongoing servicing of the building and the spend impact on the local community, so it is all very positive for the Ballykelly area.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. Will an equality impact assessment (EQIA) of the relocation be carried out?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that a full EQIA is being carried out on the decision to relocate to Ballykelly. The work is at pre-consultation stage, and a wide range of groups has been invited to give views to shape the formal consultation document. The pre-consultation exercise involves face-to-face discussions and written requests for feedback. The formal public consultation period is due to begin in mid-March of this year, and, when it is completed, the Department will consider all of the views that are returned, agree appropriate actions, including any implications for the preferred location, produce an agreed action plan and complete the final EQIA report. That will all feed into the business case.

Mr Dallat: I am sure that the Minister will accept that I am in no way biased about jobs going to Ballykelly, given the history of the haemorrhaging of jobs in recent years. Will the Minister assure the House that, when she has done the

paperwork, the jobs will come to Ballykelly and we can get on with planning, which is an important aspect of that?

Mrs O'Neill: There are a number of areas of work that we want to continue. For me, and as the Member will agree, this is an opportunity to address the existing disparity in the distribution of public sector jobs. Bringing jobs out of the greater Belfast area and into a rural location sends a strong message to the public that the Executive and the Assembly are committed to addressing that disparity. It will create an opportunity to share the wealth right across the North. It is a very positive move. I want to get the business case signed off, get the EQIA completed and ensure that we move forward as speedily as possible and deliver on the commitment in the Programme for Government.

Mr Speaker: Paul Givan is not in place to ask question 7.

Plant Security

8. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the action her Department is taking to address plant security as a result of the experience from ash dieback disease. *(AQO 3567/11-15)*

Mrs O'Neill: The ongoing experience of ash dieback disease shows the importance of agreeing the approach on plant health measures, using a fortress Ireland approach with those most likely to be affected by disease, such as woodland owners, farmers and hurley manufacturers. As a result, I have been able to co-ordinate with the South the introduction of legislation on ash plants for planting, and ash wood and bark.

I am considering further legislation, also in conjunction with the South, to introduce a requirement for the pre-notification of imports of certain species of trees from other countries in the EU. Pre-notification could assist in preventing disease outbreaks and, importantly, provide intelligence about plant movements and assist in tracing problems. It is important that our biosecurity is strengthened to reduce the risk of pests and disease entering our island.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she reassure me that the action that she has taken will be effective in protecting native trees and associated woodlands?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that we are working towards that. We are also working with the industry. It is very important that we engage with our stakeholders. We went through the winter when the symptoms are not as obvious, but, as we enter spring, we have a full plan in place to ensure that we are ready to go and that the surveillance is ongoing. We look to examples of other European countries that have had the disease and been able to look at it.

3.00 pm

We are working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in the South, and we will continue to do so. The plan that we have in place is very proactive. At present, it appears that the disease is only in young plants. We want to make sure that that remains the case and that we can deal with it and not allow it to become established in our native trees.

Mr Speaker: That concludes Question Time.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Speaker.]

Adjournment

Roads: M1 Link to the Maze Site

Mr Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have 5 minutes.

Mr Craig: With regard to the Adjournment debate — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members will please leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Mr Craig: In the Maze site, potentially, we have one of the largest investments that can take place in Northern Ireland; it is a 375-acre site that was originally the site of an airport in World War II. Those who live in the area know the history of the site. Between 1941 and 1945, it was used as a stop-off between the United States and Great Britain, and it saw thousands of American bombers come over to Europe. The site was also used to provide the north Atlantic convoy routes with cover, which made it one of the busiest airports in the entire world during those years.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, the site was used as a prison. That is where recent history probably sees it. It became famous for its infamous H-blocks, hunger strikes and, for those of us who lived only up the road, the breakout as well. Those were all hugely negative, and residents, like myself, had to put up with an awful lot over those years.

In more recent times, the site was passed to the Northern Ireland Executive and then to the Maze regeneration team, which now has the site. It was proposed as the site for the Northern Ireland sports stadium, but, sadly for all of us in Lagan Valley, that project collapsed. The Maze development corporation was established and board members appointed. Discussions took place with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS), and the historic decision was taken by the society to relocate to the Maze. The famous Balmoral show will take place at the Maze this May, and arrangements are being made for the more local Saintfield show to take place at the site. The society has plans to develop the site over the next 10 to 15 years, and it will include not only exhibition and show space but an equestrian centre of excellence.

Last week, I had the privilege of visiting the site; I was given a tour of the RUAS site and saw how it is developing. I can report that it is developing very well. They have already planted the main showgrounds and the site of the equestrian centre. The basis for much of the road infrastructure is now in situ, and I look forward to seeing it finished in the very near future.

That leads us to other issues. There are no major links from the site to the M1, the main motorway infrastructure, at present. Traffic is expected to use the Moira Road, which is an A-class road, and the Halftown and Harrys roads, which are both C-class roads. No doubt, in the short term — for the first year or two of the show's life — that will cause traffic issues in the area. I know that the corporation, local residents, the PSNI and others are

working very hard to minimise the impact, but, no doubt, that will restrict the potential for RUAS at this site for the first couple of years. In the medium to long term, such measures are not sustainable. Traffic congestion and the inevitable delays will strangle the site's potential. If the site is to develop and achieve its full potential, it is clear that more road links that directly link to the MI are required. Not only would that help to drive improvements to the Balmoral show but it would unlock the rest of the site for future development.

I am glad to say that I have learned that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has set aside around £30 million for road infrastructure on the Maze site, which will include a bridge over the M1 to support traffic coming from the west of the Province and a new dual carriageway out to Sprucefield linking to the M1 at the existing park-and-ride site. The reasons why both had to be developed were purely down to engineering issues with an existing bridge across the motorway and site restrictions in getting a direct link to the motorway. However, those are all positive issues that need to be moved forward urgently if the site is to have its full potential unlocked.

Those new roads will provide an opportunity for the development of the whole south Lisburn area around Sprucefield. Opening up the Maze site will unlock the potential for 1,000 acres of industrial and housing development in the south Lisburn area. Sprucefield, and the link that will go into the Sprucefield site, has huge potential. In the past, there was what was infamously known as the Knockmore link to Sprucefield. Unfortunately, that was never truly developed. The new road will be the first quarter of the Knockmore link. I appeal to my colleagues in the Executive, and in Roads Service in particular, to finish the Knockmore link if they can find the funds because that will be the economic driver that not only will unlock the potential for the Maze but will unlock the potential that is hidden in the industrial heartland at the south of Lisburn. As a government, we all need to see that. I believe that that is estimated to be a £10 million investment, if the Executive can find it, and it would open up not only the development of the Maze but the Knockmore industrial estate, which has waited patiently for 20 years and has been one of the most successful industrial sites for the expansion of jobs in Northern Ireland. The potential for increased investment from private developers is absolutely huge.

The Maze site must develop and attract world-renowned, high-technology industries and bring the prosperity to Northern Ireland that we are all crying out for and all our future children are looking for. In the 1980s, I had the bitter experience of coming out of university as an engineering graduate, and three quarters of my class are now spread not only to mainland UK but throughout the world. I do not want a repeat of that for my children. I want us to make the investments that will unlock the huge potential at the Maze site. Let us see world-class industry coming to that site and giving our children and our children's children the future that they deserve. I commend this to you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Givan, and the Member has roughly five minutes.

Mr Givan: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can I take this first opportunity in the House to apologise for not being in my place to ask my question to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development during Question Time? I was unduly delayed in a meeting. Therefore, I submit my apologies, Mr Speaker.

I support my colleague Mr Craig in the Adjournment debate that he has brought forward. It is important that the site gets proper road infrastructure improvements. Therefore, the £30 million that is being allocated to it is welcome indeed. If the site is to achieve its full potential and be an economic driver for our Northern Ireland economy, the infrastructure needs to be improved. It is ideally located along the Belfast-Dublin corridor to attract people from the west of the Province and to bring people up from the Southern market. Therefore, the site needs to be readily accessible. There is no point in people being able to get to Sprucefield very quickly and then facing delays because they are unable to get access to the Maze site. So, getting the road infrastructure in place is critical to the site developing properly.

In developing the roads infrastructure, it is also important that the Department takes on board any concerns that may come forward from the local residents, particularly the Halftown Road residents association, which, for decades, endured the security paraphernalia that went along with the Maze prison. Now that the site is being developed, it is critical that any views that they have on how the infrastructure is to be developed are taken on board and reflected on.

Improvements have been carried out on some roads. Indeed, the Blaris Road was recently resurfaced. Getting that road improvement in place will benefit the Maze site and the local community group in addressing all its concerns around this issue. I support the development, and I support the allocation of £30 million, trusting that it can be developed in conjunction with local people's views being taken on board.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for coming to the House and apologising for not being in his place for Question Time. I hope that that will set an example for other Members to come to the House and explain why they were not in their place.

Mrs Hale: I thank my colleague Jonathan Craig for keeping this issue very much on the agenda in the House. I welcome the opportunity to speak today. Many Members will know that I am passionate about the development at Maze and the regeneration that it will bring. I am also very concerned about the road network and infrastructure surrounding the site, especially in relation to the Culcavy Road, Halftown Road and Harry's Road. Many of those roads were never designed to accommodate high volumes of traffic in the long term.

A number of weeks ago, I met the Maze development team and its chair, Mr Brannigan. They are considering two new entrances to the site, the most significant of which is reliant on the M1 link road. Indeed, they have stated that the M1 link road access issue is always raised in preliminary discussions with potential investors in the site and employers. Its importance cannot be underplayed.

Having asked questions and quizzed the Minister for Regional Development on the issue for many, many months, I have concerns that there seems to be little urgency to ensure that developments are brought about sooner rather than later. Indeed, it has been put on record

that any plans to address the link road will not happen until after 2015, as it does not fall within the strategic road improvement programme. Therefore, progression of the M1 bypass proposal will only be subject to funding after 2015. Only at the beginning of February this year, I asked the Minister in a priority question for written answer to detail his plans for the provision of the access roads to the Maze/Long Kesh site during and after the Balmoral show in May 2013. The Minister's answer detailed only how traffic will be managed during the show, but he gave no details of the future road infrastructure, and, consequently, he did not answer my question.

Residents in the area have concerns that additional traffic in the vicinity will lead to long tailbacks and congestion, especially at times of peak traffic flow, and we need to bear it in mind that no solution has yet been found to prevent large volumes of traffic and heavy goods vehicles using those small rural roads as a bypass. It seems difficult to understand how the present infrastructure will cope with the additional traffic planned for the Maze regeneration site.

If I were being totally solution-focused, I would believe that the time is right to push on the M1 link road. It has been stated that there is no budget for the project, but I hear today that OFDMFM has agreed money. It is vital that all the relevant Departments sit down and see whether plans can be found to get the projects started sooner rather than later. Not only will it support the development of the Maze regeneration site, it will help to solve a number of the traffic problems that our constituents who live in this rural area face every day.

3.15 pm

Mr Poots: I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words on the issue.

Maze/Long Kesh gives Northern Ireland an opportunity to develop something of huge significance that can lead to real and serious inward investment and provide quality facilities that tens of thousands of people can enjoy. The scale and location of the site lend themselves to being one of the most strategically placed quality facilities in Northern Ireland for inward investment. To achieve that, though, it is incumbent on us to ensure that the opportunity can be delivered as quickly as possible, and for that we need the infrastructure to be in place. There is also an excellent opportunity for telecommunications, with Project Kelvin running just past the site.

Given the site's accessibility to the M1 and A1, we also have the opportunity to ensure that it can be hugely attractive to people not just from Northern Ireland and can attract inward investment from the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, it is of absolute importance that we recognise at an early point that the infrastructure issue needs to be addressed in a positive and progressive way.

The RUAS is moving to the site this year. We will see how things pan out. The Down Royal races take place close to the site, with up to 10,000 people attending each day, and we do not have many problems. However, the RUAS is a further step up from that, with 80,000 people attending an event over three days. That is a considerable increase in numbers. To be perfectly honest — I should declare an interest because I am a member of the RUAS — we do not want those figures to stay at 80,000; we want them to go upwards significantly. To achieve that, we need those couple of miles of access from the main roads — the M1 and A1 — to be developed quickly and strategically and have quality infrastructure put in place. The Knockmore/ Sprucefield link is a must to be delivered. That will open up an entire area for industrial and leisure development and employment opportunities. I trust that OFMDFM, in conjunction with DRD in particular, will be a driving force to ensure that all that happens.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank and congratulate the Member for bringing the debate to the House. The site, as we know from the Members who spoke previously, is of huge regional significance to this part of the island. It has major economic, social, regeneration and reconciliation potential.

There are two strands to the site. One is the EU-funded peace-building and conflict resolution facility. That has the potential to be a world-class facility to strengthen our peace-building expertise and, indeed, share our experience with the rest of the world. It is positive that that has the potential to transform a site that has been associated with the conflict and bring it into something more positive and futuristic. It is a physical expression of how our society has transformed from conflict to peace and has major potential to attract people from all around the world to come here, hear our story and learn about our conflict and how we have moved away from it.

The second strand, which was referred to, is the decision to relocate the RUAS onto 65 acres of the site, which will house the Balmoral show. That will provide an international standard facility with a main arena, equine and livestock show rings and associated landscaping and infrastructure. As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development and a rural MLA, I heartily welcome the development. It has huge economic potential in itself and can act as a catalyst for further development on that strategically important site.

Getting on to the topic of the link to the M1, I think that it is hugely important. It is important to get people onto the site, especially those from the rural areas, from areas outside Belfast and from places in the west, such as down in Tyrone, where I am from. It is vital. I support the view that direct access from the M1 is vital. It is hugely important to realise the potential of this strategic site.

Of course, the pledge in the Programme for Government commitment 15 was to:

> *"develop Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance".*

I also note that, when Minister Attwood announced in January his decision to grant planning permission, he made reference to the necessity of effective planning as a key component. The fact that the proposed site will have parking facilities for 10,000 cars gives us an indication of its potential through the sheer number of people who could be visiting it at various times over the year.

The development of the Maze/Long Kesh project is of huge regional importance, and it is obvious that it has to be matched with proper infrastructure so that the site's potential can be realised. I thank Mr Craig for bringing this debate to the House today, and I can certainly pledge my support and, indeed, that of my party for this infrastructure development.

Mrs D Kelly: I too thank Mr Craig for tabling this afternoon's Adjournment debate. Some Members may wonder why I am speaking on it, but I live in the area of Aghalee, which is not too far away from the area in question. Many Members have focused on the Sprucefield and Harry's Road end of the site, but there is also the question of Maghaberry and Moira to consider. Those of us who have to travel up the M1 and leave it at the Moira junction roundabout will know about the tailbacks that can be there already at that time and about the amount of traffic that goes through the village of Moira. So, there needs to be a much broader analysis of the area's infrastructural needs.

I want to put on record my thanks to the two junior Ministers for their presence here to hear the debate this afternoon. I would also welcome their views on the concept that the developer pays. We all know that, when a new site is opened, part of the cost of the infrastructure is actually placed on the developer. So, I want to know whether that will be part of the business case in the overall development of the Maze site.

Members will also be aware of the railway station at Moira. The Regional Development Committee is looking at integrated transport systems and at community transport in particular. So, in looking at the needs for traffic arrangements, it is also important that we look at the infrastructure in totality in relation to public use and at the opportunities that exist with having a railway halt in such close proximity.

I join others in wishing the RUAS well in its plans to avail itself of the site. I would also be interested to hear from the junior Ministers about the business case and, indeed, the initial development proposals, which included, as far as I can recall, opportunities for retail, office and housing. I would also be interested to hear how the needs of anyone who is going to live on that broader site will be addressed in relation to the totality of the infrastructure.

Mrs Overend: The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the potentially substantial social and economic benefits that the utilisation of former security sites such as the Maze site can bring. In general, we want the sites to be used, where possible, to the benefit of local communities. Alternatively, if that is not possible, they could be sold to create much-needed revenue that can be ploughed back into front line services.

Under the original proposals in the Maze/Long Kesh master plan and implementation strategy of May 2006, the scenarios that were identified included a multiparty sports stadium; a rural excellence and equestrian zone, including an international exhibition centre and showgrounds; offices, hotels and a leisure village; the creation of up to 4,000 jobs; a community zone; high-quality new housing; parkland and landscaping; and a new highway and public transport.

None of those proposals has been taken forward. It is disappointing that, after so long, the Maze site is still not being utilised to its full potential.

There have been some positive developments. For example, the Ulster Unionist Party fully supports the decision of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, as was mentioned, to move the Balmoral show from the King's Hall to the Maze site. That is, of course, a prestigious annual three-day event. It is Northern Ireland's largest agriculture and food show, and it attracts in the region of 70,000-plus visitors. There was also the possibility of the Ulster Aviation Society running more events on the site, given its impressive aircraft collection. Indeed, I have seen that for myself, Mr Speaker, and it is something that we really could build on. Hopefully, the junior Minister will be able to update us on the current status of that.

However, aspects of what is being done could be described as being insensitive to victims. The Ulster Unionist Party does not agree with the peace-building and conflict resolution centre being located at the Maze. An example of a location that would be more suitable is the Crumlin Road jail. There is also an issue over the running costs of the centre, as it is projected to run at a significant annual loss of £650,000. That is difficult to justify to the taxpayer. However, that is a debate that has been had before, and there is no need to rehearse it today.

The Adjournment debate specifically mentions the road infrastructure of the M1 to the Maze site. Of course, it is important that we have an infrastructure that is sufficient to meet the demands of its users. That is especially the case, given that, as outlined previously, the Balmoral show attracts over 70,000 visitors, with around 100,000 visitors a year expected for the peace centre. If the Maze site is finally developed to the scale originally envisaged, it is up to the Finance Minister to provide the necessary funds to upgrade any aspect of the M1 link that may be considered not to be up to standard. Clarification from the junior Minister on how OFMDFM took the surrounding infrastructure into account as it planned for the future of the Maze site would be welcomed.

The Maze site is a project that has been taken forward by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, and they must prove that they are capable of seeing through the regeneration of that former security site in its entirety. That includes having the necessary infrastructure. The Maze corporation board also has a major role to play, and, hopefully, the Minister will be able to update us on that.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I start by thanking the Member who put down the topic for debate. Is he still here? He is. I thank him for the interest he has expressed to date in the regeneration of this important strategic site.

The regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh is a high priority cited in the Programme for Government objectives for 2011-15. Commitment number 15 states our priority to:

> *"Develop Maze/Long Kesh as a regeneration site of regional significance."*

A key milestone under that commitment is to commence the site infrastructure development work in 2014-15.

The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation was established in September 2012 to regenerate the site, and it is now responsible for its regeneration, including the provision of road infrastructure. Although the regeneration plans are at a very early stage, linking the site to the M1 is identified as a high priority for the corporation, as it has the potential to attract further private sector investment to the site. However, as Members will be aware, road infrastructure is a complex process involving extensive stakeholder engagement, business case approval, design, planning permission, procurement and construction, among many other things.

Initial survey work and a feasibility study are under way by the development corporation, with a view to producing detailed proposals in due course. The proposals will consider all road infrastructure options for improving access to the site. Until that work is completed, a preferred option cannot be identified.

I encourage the Member and other interested individuals to contribute to the stakeholder engagement to help ensure the success of the project. I am pleased to report that, even at this early stage, local residents have received an initial briefing from the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation outlining the process.

The provision of road infrastructure has already been identified to improve access to the site, and that is the responsibility of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation. Funding has now been identified and allocated by OFMDFM in the current CSR period for that purpose.

3.30 pm

The provision of road infrastructure development outside that objective is the responsibility of the Department for Regional Development. Public sector funding for essential infrastructure at Maze/Long Kesh is vital and will help to attract further private sector funding to the site.

I want to touch on some issues that Members raised. The RUAS is working closely with the PSNI on traffic management for the show, including monitoring cameras. All visitor parking for the show will be on site. OFMDFM allocated £21 million in the current CSR period for a feasibility study, which is being undertaken to consider the road infrastructure options. The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation is developing a transport plan, which will include the use of rail and other transport options, such as a cycle network.

In closing, I want to make a number of quick points. The development corporation has made considerable progress on the provision of some internal roads at Maze/Long Kesh to improve traffic management and help to ensure the success of the agricultural show, which will be held on the site in May 2013. Some issues have already been dealt with, as I outlined. There is also improved access to the site. In particular, the development of a link to the M1 is key to the site's development.

The regeneration of the former military site represents a major opportunity to impact on many aspects and sectors of society here and further afield. There is no doubt that challenges lie ahead, particularly in the current economic climate. I appreciate the interest expressed in the debate as we move forward work on the Maze/Long Kesh site to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliatory potential of this regionally significant site.

I hope that that satisfies the Member who secured the debate. If Members have any other concerns, they can ask me about them outside of the Chamber.

Adjourned at 3.32 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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Agriculture and Rural Development

Public Right of Pedestrian Access to DARD Forestry Land and New Forestry Land By-laws

Published at 12.00 noon on Tuesday 12 February 2013

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Fáilte romhaimh.

I wish to advise Assembly members that from St Patrick's Day, 17 March, the public will be granted a public right of pedestrian access to DARD forestry land.

Section 31 of the Forestry Act (NI) 2010 provides, subject to byelaws, for public right of pedestrian access. The Forestry (2010 Act) (Commencement No.2) Order (NI) 2013 will bring this section into force, along with The Forestry Land Byelaws (NI) 2013.

There is much to enjoy. There are over 100 Forest Service properties that provide way-marked woodland walks. Pedestrians will have access to most of the 76,000ha of forestry land managed by the Forest Service. This land contains conifer and broadleaved plantations and natural woodlands and open space. Some of the lands are specially protected as nature reserves and historic landscapes, and the public right extends to most of these areas.

This is undoubtedly an important step under the Forestry Act (NI) 2010. The public right of pedestrian access encapsulates in law our Assembly's endorsement of our vision to promote the wider recreational and social use of the Department's forest lands. Public access to open space is a valuable resource, it gives us opportunities for tourism, for sport, it helps us to take exercise and look after our health, and reminds us of our rural environment and heritage. The public right of pedestrian access will complement local government policies on recreation and access to the countryside.

The public right of pedestrian access applies only to DARD forestry land. This land is managed by the Forest Service. I wish to make it clear that privately owned woodlands are not affected by the Order and the Byelaws. Similarly, where the Forest Service occupies land under conditions which restrict public access agreed with the original landowner then the new legislation has no effect.

Understandably, the public right of pedestrian access will not extend to any building or structure on forestry land, or to any facility for which a charge is payable. It will also be subject to certain restrictions as set out in The Forestry Land Byelaws (NI) 2013.

When we consulted on the Byelaws in 2011 there was very significant public and cross-departmental interest, reflecting the wide use of forests for passive and active recreation, and the legal rights by third parties to use forestry land. The clear wish of many was that the form of the legislation should be simple, that the byelaws should not be drafted to cover every eventuality; and that DARD should recognise that visitors to forests are prepared to act responsibly, and to take responsibility for their own safety.

Of course, some limitations are needed, to allow the Department to intervene when people behave irresponsibly, to protect the forests from damage and disease, and to provide for public safety when forestry operations create a hazard for the public. However, I am now confident that these Byelaws strike an excellent balance between personal freedom and legal restrictions. I am grateful to the wide range of stakeholders who responded to our consultation and who helped me achieve this balanced outcome.

The public will now be able to exercise their public right of pedestrian access day or night unless the forest is closed for one of the reasons allowed in the byelaws. Dogs must be kept under control, and in core recreational areas this will mean that they need to be kept on a lead. The Byelaws recognise that some behaviour is likely to create annoyance to other forest visitors, they provide examples of unacceptable behaviour, and they allow forestry officials to remove people whose behaviour is unacceptable.

We value our public forests and the opportunity they give for informal access to open countryside. This legislation is an important step in moving the permissive access to Forest Service lands and the first Forest Parks that we have enjoyed since the 1950's, to a legal right to be enjoyed responsibly by everybody. My Statement will be available on the DARD website in due course.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Proposals to Suspend Commercial Eel Fishing in Europe

Published at 4.00 pm on Monday 18 February 2013

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am writing to update Members on proposals to amend the EC Eel Regulations that could potentially result in the suspension of commercial eel fishing across Europe, including the eel fishery on Lough Neagh. This is to be discussed at a meeting of the European Parliament Fisheries Committee today.

The European eel stock has been in rapid decline since around 1980 and the European Commission introduced the Eel Conservation Regulation in 2007 requiring the establishment of National Eel Management Plans (EMP). The Plans must demonstrate, among other issues that at least 40% of adult eels from each river basin are escaping to spawn. The Lough Neagh Bann catchment area is the only area in the North where eel fishing is permitted.

As you will be aware, Lough Neagh is the largest commercial wild eel fishery in Europe and is unique in that there is no other eel fishery in Europe similarly structured and managed. The fishery is run by the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society which has the rights to the eel fishing in the Lough and administers its own regulations, in addition to National and European imposed regulations, to ensure standards and sustainable fishing practices.

The Society has successfully balanced commercial activity with the effective conservation and management of the fishery over the past 40 years aimed at ensuring the sustainability of eel stocks. Scientific advice from the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) confirms that Eel stock in the Lough Neagh/Bann basin are currently meeting its conservation targets. The vast majority of the eel catch is exported and it is estimated that the livelihoods of some 300 families in the area are dependent on the fishery with a value to the local economy in excess of £3m per annum. The EU has also recognised the regional importance of the eel and it enjoys protected geographical indication status.

I know that Members will share my concerns about the Commission's current eel measures regarding the proposal to automatically suspend fishing for eels across the EU. This would have a significant impact on the sustainability of the Lough Neagh eel fishery and the wider local economy within the catchment. While recognising the importance of conserving eel stocks, I am not prepared to consider any future proposals for the recovery of EU eels stocks without independent scientific evidence, an appropriate equality impact assessment in accordance with Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, consultation with all stakeholder interests and appropriate compensation for fishermen affected during any proposed suspension.

I am also firmly of the view that these proposals should be rejected and I have written to the Minister responsible for Fisheries in the Department of Environment Fisheries and Rural Affairs to express my concerns and to ensure that these views are conveyed to the European Parliament Fisheries Committee.

I am meeting with a delegation from the Lough Neagh Eel Fisheries Co-operative and other stakeholders this week and will also be meeting Michelle O'Neill, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development in view of her interest in the matter.

I will keep Members updated on developments.

Regional Development

Settlement in the case of Declan Gormley v the Department for Regional Development and Others

Published at 1.30 pm on Thursday 21 February 2013

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I wish to make a Statement to the Assembly in respect of my decision to reach a settlement with Mr Declan Gormley who had taken action against the Department for Regional Development and 4 individuals, including my predecessor Conor Murphy, MP.

Mr Gormley had taken his case as a result of the decision to dismiss him from the position of non-executive director with NI Water in March 2010 following the publication of a report by an Independent Review Team. At that time Conor Murphy, MP was Minister for Regional Development.

Following the recent High Court Case in which Mr Gormley was awarded damages against Sinn Fein, he had indicated that all that he wanted from the litigation against the Department and the other defendants was an apology and the legal costs incurred in the case. In light of this statement I felt duty bound to ensure that this was explored with Mr Gormley's legal advisers.

Following tough negotiations by both parties it was eventually possible to reach a settlement on the basis of an apology on behalf of the Department and the payment of Mr Gormley's reasonable legal costs but without payment of damages.

The terms of the settlement are as follows:

> *The Plaintiff will stay the proceedings on terms that he will obtain no relief from any of the defendants apart from the Department, but the Department will give an apology in the following terms:*
>
> *"APOLOGY: MR.DECLAN GORMLEY*
>
> *In March 2010 some of the non-executive directors of Northern Ireland Water Limited, including Mr. Declan Gormley were dismissed from the board of that company by the then Minister for Regional Development, Mr Conor Murphy. The Department was the sole shareholder in the company.*
>
> *Whilst this is regretted, it would now be impracticable for the situation to be reversed.*
>
> *Notwithstanding this the Department categorically acknowledges that Mr Gormley was not guilty of any personal wrongdoing or misconduct in his role as non-executive director of Northern Ireland Water. The Department further acknowledges that his removal from office did not reflect adversely in any respect on his character or integrity.*
>
> *The Department has now apologised to Mr Gormley and has agreed to pay his costs. Mr Gormley has accepted the apology, which is all that he wished to secure from this litigation. Accordingly the matter is now closed."*
>
> *The plaintiff will not receive any damages but the Department will pay the plaintiff's reasonable costs to date.*

As always I had to weigh a number of factors in coming to my decision. I believe that I have acted entirely in the public interest in deciding that this case should be settled.

Finance and Personnel

De-agentisation of Land and Property Services

Published at 12:00 noon on Friday 22 February 2013

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): In recent months my department has considered the future delivery of the functions provided by Land & Property Services (LPS). As a result, I have agreed that LPS will cease to be an Executive Agency within the Department from 1 April 2013.

LPS will retain its branding and continue to deliver the same services as before, but as a business area within the Department rather than as an Agency. This is largely an administrative change and will have no impact on the daily work of the majority of staff.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Community Resuscitation Strategy

Published at 10.30 am on Tuesday 26 February 2013

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly advising Members of my intention to develop a Community Resuscitation Strategy for Northern Ireland.

In February 2012 the Assembly debated a motion on the provision of Emergency Life Support (ELS) skills training to every school, community and workplace in Northern Ireland.

ELS skills are the key set of actions needed to keep someone alive until professional help arrives. It includes performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR); dealing with choking and serious bleeding; how to put someone in the recovery position, and helping someone who may be having a heart attack.

The evidence indicates that in places where there is a high proportion of the population trained in ELS skills the survival rate for those who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest is higher than in areas where the proportion of the population trained in ELS skills is low.

While I welcomed the Assembly motion last February, I also acknowledged the valuable work that is already taking place across Northern Ireland, by the Health and Social Care service and a number of voluntary organisations such as the British Heart Foundation, ABC for Life, the Red Cross and St John Ambulance. As Minister, however, I am conscious that resources both within the health service and in the voluntary and community sector are finite. We need to make the best possible use of the resources that are available to ensure that we maximise the number of people trained in ELS skills.

I have asked the Chief Medical Officer to establish a working group to develop a community resuscitation strategy for Northern Ireland, aimed at coordinating available resources to maximise the number of individuals trained in ELS skills. The working group will be chaired by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and will include representatives from my Department, Health and Social Care bodies, community and voluntary bodies involved in resuscitation training as well as representation from other Northern Ireland Departments such as the Department of Education, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Social Development.

Each year in Northern Ireland approximately 1,300 cardiac arrests occur outside a hospital environment. Tragically, fewer than 10% of people who suffer an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest will survive to be discharged from hospital. In the Programme for Government 2011-2015 my Department has made a commitment to improve access to thrombolysis and to expand cardiac catheterisation capacity to improve access to diagnostic intervention and treatment and the development of a new primary percutaneous coronary intervention (primary PCI) service model for NI by 2014/15. Key to maximising the benefit to the population of this PfG commitment and investment is survival to thrombolysis or in due course primary PCI

service. The earlier patients are treated with thromolysis or coronary interventions the better their chances are of recovery. By extending ELS training and keeping people alive to allow them to avail of thrombolysis or primary PCI we can maximise the chances of survival or improved recovery from heart attack. With 1,300 cardiac arrests occurring outside a hospital environment each year in NI and less than 130 of these surviving to discharge I recognise we have some considerable way to go, however I believe ELS training can help us ensure more timely responses and better outcomes for patients. I have therefore no doubt about the need to extend ELS training in order to save more lives.

We need to, and we can, achieve greater coverage in communities, schools and workplaces throughout Northern Ireland. We can achieve this if Ministers, their Departments, District Councils, other public bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations continue to work in partnership and develop new approaches to ELS training.

I believe a Northern Ireland community resuscitation strategy will help to focus a drive to increase the number of people, of all ages, trained in ELS skills and to coordinate the use of available resources to achieve this. The working group will be asked to have the ready strategy for consultation by October 2013.

Regional Development

Transport Northern Ireland

Published at 12:00 Noon on Monday 4 March 2013

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): In recent years my Department has been considering the best model for the future delivery of both roads and public transport authority functions. As a result I have agreed that in line with a number of other jurisdictions, there should be a single organisation within my Department responsible for the delivery of roads functions and securing public transport services. This new organisation will be called Transport NI and it will come into effect from 1st April 2013.

Transport NI will be a combination of two existing business units within my Department: Roads Service and Public Transport Finance and Governance; and as a result there will be no impact on staff numbers or other resources within my Department.

Transport NI will be responsible for the following functions:

- All functions currently delivered by Roads Service including:
- The design of major and minor road improvement schemes including schemes to improve road safety;
- The maintenance of the road network including roads, footways, bridges, street lights, etc;
- The management of the road network including the provision of a winter service, as well as managing motorway communications and signalised junctions;
- Securing the delivery of public transport services; and in the future
- The development of local public transport plans.

The new arrangements will better coordinate the management of the road network and the delivery of public transport services in the future.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Social Development

12 February 2013

Welfare Reform Bill [NIA 13/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Ms Paula Bradley
Ms Pam Brown
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mr Michael Copeland
Mr Mark Durkan
Mr David McClarty

Witnesses:

Ms Martina Campbell	Department for
Ms Jane Corderoy	Social Development
Mr Michael Pollock	

The Chairperson: Members are aware that today we enter into the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Welfare Reform Bill. The Committee Stage of the Bill started on 11 October 2012. The Committee received some 50 written responses and considered oral evidence from 18 key stakeholder organisations and, of course, the Department for Social Development. Given the Committee's extensive consideration of evidence and responses from the Department, we agreed that the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny can commence today.

Members have previously set out their interim positions on the Bill's clauses, which we went through last week. During the clause-by-clause scrutiny, members will be asked to set out their final positions, subject to the report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules and any consequential amendments. If members do not feel that they can agree a clause, that must be clearly stated during this session. If that happens, the member will be asked to set out his or her proposed recommendation, opposition or amendment.

This is the countdown to our final consideration of the Bill, and the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny is important. The departmental officials — Jane, Martina and Michael — are here this morning to assist the Committee on any issues that we are not sure about or that we did not conclude on. Last week, we had quite a discussion on, first, trying to get a consensus report, and, secondly, agreeing the number of clauses that members determined that they did not wish to support at this time. There will be a caveat in so far as the report's preface will state that there are a number of outstanding issues — for example, universal credit, which is out to consultation — and members felt that they could not support the relevant clauses as they are currently drafted because a consultation is under way. In addition, the Minister is deliberating with Westminster on flexibilities or variances on, for example, sanctions and other issues. The Executive may also wish to take some mitigating measures, over which the Committee has no control.

Last week, members agreed the clauses that they would not currently support. That does not prevent members either changing their mind this morning and voting for or against an amendment or a proposed clause, or tabling amendments now or at Consideration Stage. In other words, we understand, and it is written into our report, that members will be voting at Committee Stage on the clauses, bearing in mind how deliberations may continue when the Bill leaves the Committee, with the Minister seeking either other flexibilities or Executive support. That is the basis on which members adopt their position at Committee Stage, which is not in any way prejudicial to how members may or may not vote, or table relevant amendments that they think are appropriate or necessary, in the Assembly at Consideration Stage.

If members are satisfied with that approach, the Committee Clerk and his staff have gone through the Committee's discussions and identified a number of clauses, based on last week's positions, that the Committee may or may not support as they are currently drafted. That does not mean that members will not be able to table amendments or vote in a different way at Consideration Stage. Members will be guided by the outworkings of consultations, Executive deliberations and any mitigating measures that may be taken to alleviate our concerns. At any time, members are free to table amendments or be guided by parity issues or costs in the way in which they finally vote on the Bill.

Members have the Bill, the explanatory and financial memorandum, the clause-by-clause summary table and advice from the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

Before we commence the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny, I welcome Sydney Anderson.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, Chair.

The Chairperson: He replaces Sammy Douglas. We have written to Sammy expressing our gratitude for his work on the Committee. We wish him well.

Are members content that that is the position that we have adopted before we start our formal clause-by-clause scrutiny?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Some clauses are grouped because of their relevance to one another. I will go through the clauses one by one or in their little groups. We will note whether or not members support clauses. I remind members to refer to their recommendations paper, which contains the clauses on which the Committee has retained its position; they are the clauses that members will not support. For the most part, the recommendations are well qualified and prefaced. We intend to go through the clause-by-clause scrutiny today and then have our next Committee meeting on Thursday morning, at which we will finalise our report on the Committee Stage of the Welfare Reform Bill. It will, obviously, include the results of our clause-by-clause scrutiny and other elements on which we agreed, and it will

also refer to the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations. Members are still free to raise individual matters today or on Thursday.

If members are content, we will now go through the clauses. It is entirely up to members to raise any issue that they wish to during today's discussions. The purpose of doing business in the way in which we did, which is the normal procedure for Committee Stage, is that we have more or less had all our discussions and probably do not need much more, if any, discussion. I intend to go through the clauses, but members are free to raise any issues.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Basic conditions)

The Chairperson: Clause 4 is included in the recommendations paper. Based on our discussions, it was decided that the Committee was not agreed to clause 4 as drafted.

Mr G Campbell: Can we take your opening caveat as read, rather than repeating it ad nauseam?

The Chairperson: That is even better. Thank you.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and negatived.

Clause 4 disagreed to.

Clauses 5 to 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 disagreed to.

Clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 disagreed to.

Clauses 13 to 25 agreed to.

Clause 26 disagreed to.

Clauses 27 to 32 agreed to.

Ms P Bradley: Chair, may I interrupt? I am looking back at clause 26, "Higher level sanctions". The recommendations paper states:

> *"In this context the Committee was content to agree the clause as drafted."*

Am I reading this correctly? We have disagreed clause 26.

The Committee Clerk: The Committee was interested in exploring with the Minister the possibility of varying the sanction regime. If that is the case, you cannot support the sanction regime if you want to ask the Minister to review it.

Ms P Bradley: OK.

The Chairperson: Remember that, because the Minister is in discussions about trying to vary the sanctions.

Mr G Campbell: With the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The Chairperson: With DWP.

The Committee Clerk: If the Committee is then of a mind of not being content to agree it rather than asking the Minister to go and review it, that is the approach.

The Chairperson: Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

Clauses 33 to 51 agreed to.

Clause 52 disagreed to.

Clause 53 agreed to.

Clause 54 disagreed to.

Clauses 55 to 68 agreed to.

Clause 69 disagreed to.

Clauses 70 to 98 agreed to.

Clause 99 disagreed to.

Clauses 100 to 102 agreed to.

Clause 103 (Recovery of benefit payments)

The Chairperson: I want to draw members' attention to this clause because the recommendations paper states that the Committee was not content to agree it. There was a bit of discussion on this, and members talked about the de minimis level of £65. The Department gave us rising figures for the cost of increasing the de minimis figures. When we reflected on this, I am not entirely sure what the Committee was minded to do. I think that we were asking the Minister to consider it; I do not know that we were actually opposing the clause per se. So, I am not sure whether members want to agree the clause and ask the Minister to review it.

Ms P Bradley: I think that that was the general feeling.

The Chairperson: Are members content to agree the clause and to ask the Minister to look at the de minimis levels?

Mr Durkan: Is it similar to the other clause? If we agree it, can the Minister still look into it?

The Chairperson: This is not one of the clauses concerning the cautions; those are a little complex and interrelated. This clause is saying that a figure of £65 at the moment would be non-recoverable and that anything above that would be recoverable. We were given a list of statistics that showed what the difference might be in the cost for non-recovery to the Department if the rates were raised to £70, £75 or £80. I think that the bulk of the money that would not be captured would be in the £70 or £75 range. Is that not right, Martina?

Ms Martina Campbell (Department for Social Development): I think that that is right. I do not have the figures at the moment.

Mr Michael Pollock (Department for Social Development): Something like 22,000 incidences of overpayments were affected. I think that the figures in the table represented 22,000 multiplied by the difference between £65 and £75.

Ms M Campbell: We have agreed to look at the guidance again to give decision-makers a better flavour of when they would apply the de minimis level.

The Chairperson: So, are we content to agree the clause as drafted?

Mr Brady: Can I just check something, Martina? I suppose a lot of the smaller ones would maybe apply when somebody died or there was a delay in the reporting and that kind of thing.

Ms M Campbell: Yes, or if people did not get notification of their change in on time or something like that.

The Chairperson: Are members happy enough?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 103 agreed to.

Clauses 104 to 108 agreed to.

Clauses 109 and 110 disagreed to.

Clauses 111 to 114 agreed to.

Clause 115 disagreed to.

Clauses 116 to 132 agreed to.

Clause 133 (Commencement)

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 133?

Ms Jane Corderoy (Department for Social Development): I just want to make the Committee aware that the Government amendment that we will table at Consideration Stage for the new discretionary social scheme will become clause 133. I think that the officials who are leading on that hope to have that amendment with you at some point this week so that you can look at the enabling clause before Consideration Stage.

The Chairperson: Are you saying that clause 132 will become clause 133?

Ms Corderoy: No. Clause 133 will become clause 134, and clause 134 will become clause 135. There will be a new clause 133, which will be the enabling clause for bringing forward the new discretionary social scheme.

The Clerk of Bills: That is fine. That is a new clause, so at the end of the clause-by-clause scrutiny, you may want to put the Question on that to the Committee.

The Chairperson: I just want to make sure that we get this right. So, clause 133 will become clause 134. Are members content with that? Are there are no objections to the numerical change?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 133 agreed to.

Clause 134 (Short title)

The Chairperson: Clause 134, which is the short title, will now become clause 135. Are members content with that clause and with its numbering?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 134 agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: We will now discuss new clause 133. Do we have the wording for that?

Ms Corderoy: We do, but I do not know whether it has been cleared with the Minister yet. I think that that is what we are waiting for.

The Chairperson: Can we take guidance on it?

Ms Corderoy: I know that the Committee may have heard from the departmental officials who are leading on the policy, and Leo McLaughlin and Brian Doherty from the agency may have been up to talk about the details. I think that it is out to public consultation at the moment. I can give you a general overview of it, if you are happy with that.

The Chairperson: You gave us an explanation, so it might just be that the best that we can do is acknowledge that the Department has indicated that it will bring forward a new clause 133, the purpose of which is as you articulated it a minute ago. Is that fair enough? I think that we are probably generally content with the explanation that we were given, so, subject to that, members are content.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

Schedules 1 to 12 agreed to.

The Committee Clerk: I just want to clarify two issues about some of the clauses. In his report, the Examiner of Statutory Rules recommended that the regulation-making powers under clause 33 and clause 91 should be subject to the confirmatory procedure. I know that, at the previous meeting, there was some discussion about how far those recommendations went along with the Department and the Office of the Legislative Counsel (OLC). So, I want to be sure that the Committee has made the right decision on recommending that, following the guidance of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, that would be the case.

The Clerk of Bills: Making clause 33 subject to the confirmatory procedure would require an amendment to clause 44, which was grouped with another two clauses. Making clause 91 subject to the confirmatory procedure would require an amendment to clause 93. If the Committee is of the view that it will be moving in that direction, you may want to revisit those two clauses to say that, "The Committee is content, subject to regulations — [Inaudible.] — amendment to come forward."

The Chairperson: Do you want to read that into the record? I think that that is what members agreed.

The Clerk of Bills: I think that you agreed clause 44 and clause 93.

The Chairperson: The Committee Clerk has reminded me that the Department has been in discussions with OLC, so you may have something further to add.

Ms M Campbell: Sorry; I have nothing more to report.

The Committee Clerk: It would be unusual for a Committee not to follow the guidance of the Examiner of Statutory Rules on recommendations on regulation-making powers. If we are thinking about amendments, it was my error; I should have pointed that out earlier. The issue is really whether the Committee is content for an amendment to clause 44 to be tabled.

The Chairperson: We have an amendment for regulation-making powers in clause 33, subject to the confirmatory procedure. If you remember, we had a discussion about recommendations from the Examiner of Statutory Rules about getting a higher level of accountability by the Assembly. This is really just to give effect to that and to accept the recommendations of the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

The Committee Clerk: The Examiner of Statutory Rules was — [Inaudible.] — and really the only points that he made were about how clause 33 and clause 44 should be

subject to the confirmatory procedure. The Department indicated that it was in discussions with the OLC about that. If the Committee were to agree those clauses as drafted, it would not be following the advice of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. So, it is a case of proposing amendments to ensure that the advice of the Examiner of Statutory Rules is followed in respect of the confirmatory procedure.

The Chairperson: Can we just read that into the record?

The issue is how we procedurally formalise that.

The Clerk of Bills: Members may want to look at the report, which is in the papers.

The Chairperson: It involves only two clauses: clause 33 and clause 34.

The Clerk of Bills: Not 33 and 34.

The Committee Clerk: It relates to clause 33 and clause 91. It is a case of revisiting clause 44 and clause 92 and amending them in accordance with the recommendations of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. So, the amendment reads:

"Clause 44, page 21, line 25
At end insert -
c) regulations under clause 33"

Question put and agreed to.

The Committee Clerk: Similarly, the amendment to clause 93 reads:

"Clause 93, page 65, line 26
At end insert -
(c) regulations under clause 91"

Those amendments are then following the Examiner's recommendations.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Brady: Can I ask about the talk about the confirmatory and the affirmative procedures? Which will apply?

The Chairperson: It will make the provision subject to the confirmatory procedure?

On that basis, are members agreed?

Members indicated assent.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: That concludes the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny. Michael, did you want to say something?

Mr Pollock: Just for our purposes, when we were going through the clause-by-clause scrutiny, I thought that clause 33 and clause 44 were agreed as drafted. Are we now saying that they are in the recommendations paper?

The Chairperson: We will revisit them because we had neglected to remind ourselves about the recommendations of the Examiner of Statutory Rules. If you remember, the Department is in discussions with OLC about that to resolve the issue. So, it is just about raising the level of accountability through the confirmatory procedure.

Mr Pollock: Is it the same for clause 93?

The Clerk of Bills: Can I just clarify that, to change the regulation-making power in clause 33, clause 44 has to be amended. So, clause 44 was revisited. To make the regulation-making power in clause 91 subject to the confirmatory procedure, clause 93 needs to be amended, so it was also revisited. So, this applies to clauses 44 and 93.

The Chairperson: Are members happy with that? Thank you, Michael.

On that basis, we have concluded the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny. The Committee will return on Thursday morning for our normal Committee business, after which we will recommence the final deliberations on the Welfare Reform Bill, when we will agree the full report.

Mr G Campbell: Just on a general point and going back to our discussion on the previous meeting, the recommendations paper had a series of issues arising from a number of clauses about which either the Minister was in discussions about variations or he was going to discuss them with Executive colleagues with a view to trying to get resources. I take it that the Committee is clear that, at some point in the Bill's progress, those questions will receive answers. We will then get the very clear picture both about what we would like and the response to that.

The Chairperson: As you know, we have made it very clear that this is the view that members here, who have had long deliberations on the Bill, have adopted and that it will not prejudice how members may have to vote, either because of parity or cost reasons or because they may have got an answer that satisfied them. Parties and their members and those from non-parties will consider all this in the round when the Bill reaches Consideration Stage.

I thank the departmental officials for being very helpful and patient with the Committee.

Ms M Campbell: You are very welcome.

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 15 February 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Childcare Fund

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) which organisations can bid for childcare funding from their Department; and (ii) to detail the process by which this funding is distributed.
(AQW 18680/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive allocated an additional £12 million across the current Comprehensive Spending Review period to support the development of the Childcare Strategy. Departments currently bid annually to the Childcare Fund, putting forward projects that will support the development of the Strategy. The bids are submitted to OFMDFM and we take the final decisions on which projects to support. It is the responsibility of individual departments to secure the relevant expenditure approvals, including business cases and evaluations.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 18866/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive is expected soon to confirm the functions which will transfer to Local Government under Local Government Reform.

Child Poverty

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a child poverty delivery plan will be published.
(AQO 3236/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the Executive to publish a Child Poverty Strategy and to measure how actions it takes impact on the numbers of children living in poverty. The Act details four statutory measures against which progress has to be measured and reported on annually. The overall target is the eradication of child poverty in the UK by 2020.

To support the delivery of these targets, OFMDFM commissioned work by the National Children's Bureau to develop a Child Poverty Outcomes Model to help better understand the role of each department in addressing the issue of child poverty. We have also developed a number of signature projects as part of our Delivering Social Change programme that we announced in October 2012 which will contribute to the delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy.

We are pleased with the progress that has been made and look forward to further progress in line with our commitments in the Programme for Government. However, there are no plans to publish a stand-alone action plan. The next annual report on child poverty is scheduled to be laid before the Assembly in March 2013.

Shackleton Barracks

Mr Ó hOisín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there has been any investigation into the potential for sporting provision within the curtilage of the former Shackleton base, Ballykelly.
(AQW 19049/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM has held discussions with local community organisations in Ballykelly who have an interest in using a vacant building on the former Shackleton Barracks site and also the possibility of using parts of the site for sports. Options are being considered on the future uses for the site including the location of the DARD Headquarters and how the site can deliver social and economic benefits for the local community.

In the meantime, the Shackleton Barracks site has been used for motor sports events in 2012 with further events planned and approved for 2013, which will bring visitors and competitors into the area.

Educational Underachievement

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the three year Queen's University Belfast research programme which examines the causes and differences in educational underachievement.
(AQW 19054/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This project entitled 'Understanding differential educational achievement within and between areas of multiple deprivation in NI – a case study approach' is being carried out by Professor Ruth Leitch, Professor Joanne Hughes, supported by Dr Ian Shuttleworth and Dr Michael Levers.

The project commenced in March 2012 and is currently on schedule and within budget.

The project has, to date, submitted one progress report and the second progress report is due in March 2013. To date (as per the first interim report) the research has conducted the following:

- Literature review to set the context for the research
- Quantitative analysis (secondary) to establish historical trends
- Development and design of baseline information in the target electoral wards.
- Establishment of key contacts and relationship building in each of the target wards
- Developed a data collection strategy and action plan for the next phase of research – (Nov/Dec 2012 – September 2013).

The findings are not scheduled to be published until the final project report which is due to be received in March 2015.

Childcare Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how much of the £12 million ring-fenced for the Childcare Fund has been spent by (a) each Department; and (ii) projects within each Department; (ii) to outline the rationale for funding each project and how it fits with the vision for a childcare strategy.
(AQW 19221/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: All departmental bids to the Executive Childcare Fund are assessed to ensure alignment with proposals for the development of the Childcare Strategy.

The overall aim of the Strategy will be to promote the availability of good quality, accessible, integrated and affordable childcare provision that is sustainable in the long-term. Working with key partners, we aim to:

- support the development of children and young people and enable children and young people from the most deprived backgrounds to avail of life opportunities;
- support increased parental participation in the workforce, thereby making a significant impact on the economy, families and communities; and
- support learning and development activity which will improve opportunities for employment.

In 2011/12, we allocated departments £322,000 from the Fund for spending in that year. These allocations are detailed below by department and project.

DHSSPS was allocated £250,000 to:

(a) (i) expedite reducing the backlog in the registration and inspection of childminding and day care settings; and (ii) to implement revised procedures to mitigate future delays. Registration and inspection of facilities are essential to ensure the safety of children in childcare settings.

(b) OFMDFM spent £20,000 to enable PlayBoard to provide additional grant funding to the South Armagh Childcare Consortium (SACC). This funding was necessary to enable SACC to continue its progress towards financial sustainability.

(c) DCAL spent £52,000 enabling Northern Ireland Screen to increase – from 68 to 338 – the number of extended service schools benefiting from After School Film Clubs. After School Film Clubs target schools in areas of high social deprivation and provide support for parental participation in the workforce. They offer child-centred activity in a safe place, and promote positive social interaction and cultural awareness.

In 2012/13, we took decisions that would allow Childcare Fund expenditure of up to £4.5 million over the remaining years of the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Of this, £860,000 will be spent before the end of 2012/13. The £860,000 is detailed below by department and project.

(a) DHSSPS will spend £220,000 to scope the childcare needs of vulnerable families. This information will enable childcare services to be tailored to respond to particular family needs.

(b) DHSSPS will spend £150,000 to enhance provision for children with a disability, directly addressing the quality of childcare available for children with a disability.

(c) DE will spend £370,000 to provide additional support programmes for children aged 2-3 and their parents, particularly those who have expressed an interest in the Sure Start developmental programme for 2-3 year olds but have not received a place. Sure Start projects are based in the most disadvantaged areas; families in these areas will be able to benefit from any extension of the work of Sure Start.

(d) DCAL will spend £120,000 enabling Northern Ireland Screen to continue provision of After School Film Clubs to extended schools.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the Children and Young People's Early Action paper replaces the Children and Young People's Strategy 'Our Children and Young People, 2006-16 Action Plans'; (ii) who has responsibility for delivering on the Children and Young People's Early Actions paper; (iii) how success will be measured; and (iv) given that the action plans detailed in the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People ended in 2011, whether further action plans will be developed to ensure the delivery of this ten year strategy.
(AQW 19222/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Children and Young People's Strategy is being taken forward under the Delivering Social Change Framework.

The Delivering Social Change Framework allows us to move away from previous lengthy and disjointed action plans and enables us to identify the most pressing issues and co-ordinate and focus action to maximise impact.

The Children and Young Persons Early Action Paper identifies the key priorities for children and families and focuses efforts and resources on a joined up approach to tackling poverty and improving the lives and experiences of our children and young people.

Actions arising from the Early Actions Paper will be assigned to a lead department which will be responsible for overseeing delivery as well as evaluating effectiveness.

The delivery of the six Signature Programmes, which we announced on 10 October 2012 and which included proposed work around Family Support Hubs, Children's Nurture Units and Parenting Support Programmes, is the first tangible outworking of this approach.

Further actions will be identified taking account of the Early Actions Paper and the detail of the Children and Young People's Ten Year Strategy. The format in which these will be presented is under consideration.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Childcare Strategy will be published for public consultation.
(AQW 19273/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the Childcare Strategy opened on 5 December 2012. The closing date for consultation responses is 5 March 2013.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Childcare Strategy will be completed and implemented.
(AQW 19274/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the Childcare Strategy is currently underway and will conclude on 5 March 2013. The final Strategy will be published as soon as possible after that date. All comments and views received during consultation, and the findings of research being carried out in parallel, will be considered to inform the detail of the Strategy, including the timescale for its implementation.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what weight will be given to the public consultation events due to take place on the Childcare Strategy, given that the business case for the final strategy is already being undertaken by consultants.
(AQW 19275/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Childcare Strategy is still in development and public consultation is an integral part of that development process. The comments and submissions received during the current consultation will inform and shape the final Strategy.

In parallel to the consultation exercise, research is currently underway to examine factors relevant to childcare such as need, cost and capacity. The research will identify potential options for intervention and, ultimately, produce a business case for the preferred option. The researchers are engaging directly with childcare stakeholders and will take full account of the comments and submissions received during consultation.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how Social Investment Fund groups will work with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) to ensure that the evidenced based need, which was established by the CYPSP, is not duplicated; (ii) how these groups will be monitored; and (iii) how these groups will deliver for children and young people.
(AQW 19278/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

(i) Initial steering groups, some of which include representatives from the children and young people's sector, have been actively engaging the wider community in the identification of evidenced based, objective needs over the past four months. This has included active engagement with organisations which are represented on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) to scope existing priorities and interventions to inform final proposed projects and identify how the Social Investment Fund (SIF) can add value, enhance provision and maximise the impact for local communities in relation to priority issues.

(ii) An OFMDFM development officer has been allocated to each zone to support steering groups in the development of the area plans and to monitor delivery of approved projects on the ground. Steering groups will be expected to report progress on a regular basis via monitoring reports.

(iii) Where issues affecting children and young people are identified as a priority for the zone, in consultation with the wider community, relevant interventions should be included in the final plan for delivery in targeted communities across the zones. Indeed, we would expect to see projects targeted at children and young people given the strategic objectives and their focus on tackling educational underachievement, addressing poor mental and physical health and supporting young parents and children and young people at risk.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Protection Fund.
(AQW 19590/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Protection Fund was designed to help individuals and families facing hardship due to the ongoing economic downturn.

Last year, some £22 million was distributed by the Department for Social Development and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety as Winter Fuel Payments for benefit recipients and cancer patients.

However, no funding was explicitly allocated to the Social Protection Fund over the remaining three years of the budget period, rather a commitment to make money available if or when required.

Following further policy development, we now have one consolidated and integrated 'Delivering Social Change Fund' which will afford us the opportunity to respond quickly, and in a flexible manner, to urgent social needs as they arise and address the specific needs of some of our most vulnerable individuals and families. The initial consolidated fund has £92 million over this spending review period.

Economy

Mr McQuillan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on how they are progressing towards rebalancing the Economy.
(AQO 3355/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The devolution of Corporation Tax is one of the key measures that will help towards rebalancing the economy.

The final report of the findings of the Joint Ministerial Working Group was sent to the Prime Minister for his consideration in November.

The Prime Minister wrote to us on 9 January to confirm he will meet us in London to hear our views on Corporation Tax devolution in detail and his office would work with ours to identify a suitable date. We continue to press for this meeting to take place as soon as possible.

In March 2012, the Executive launched their Economic Strategy which set out a long-term vision to rebalance the Economy to 2030.

Less than one year on, Departments across the Executive are making significant progress in implementing their Economic Strategy commitments, activity which will, in the longer term, improve the competitiveness of the local economy and deliver higher levels of sustainable growth and employment.

The Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy is monitoring progress and will produce an annual report in June which will detail the extent to which these commitments are being delivered and an assessment of the wider health of the Economy.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Watercourses

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to improve the drainage of agricultural land over the past year.
(AQW 19007/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Drainage (NI) order 1973 grants permissive power to Rivers Agency to conduct maintenance on rural watercourses that have been designated for upkeep at public expense. The Rivers Agency operates an ongoing inspection and maintenance regime for rural watercourses based on a 6 year cycle and during the financial year 2011/2012 the Rivers Agency inspected and maintained some 1,200 kilometres of rural watercourses throughout the province.

Food Production

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what impact waterlogging and high rainfall levels have had on food production in the past year, and which crops have been affected.
(AQW 19008/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The high rainfalls throughout 2012 have had a significant effect on all crops. My technical teams at CAFRE have indicated the reduction in production compared to average is:

Crop	Estimated Reduction in yield
Potatoes	19%
Barley	13%
Wheat	23%
Oats	21%
Grass	10%
Forage Maize	35%
Bramley apples	35 -40%
Carrots	20%
Parsnips	10%
Turnips	25%
Leeks	10%
Scallions	No change
Cabbages	20%
Cauliflowers	50%
Broccoli	40%
Brussels Sprouts	30%

Both grass and forage maize are converted into food through animals producing milk and red meat. Farmers have compensated for reduced quantity and quality of forage by feeding more concentrates and, as a result production of milk and meat has not fallen commensurately.

Soil Improvement

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what provisions and systems exist within her Department to encourage land and soil quality improvement.
(AQW 19009/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department published advice on managing farmland soils in the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution of Soil. This Code sets out practical advice for farmers to maintain and improve soil quality and fertility and avoid pollution of soil.

- All farmers in receipt of direct agricultural support payments must meet the cross-compliance requirements. One element of these requirements is the need to keep land in Good Agricultural and Environment Condition (GAEC). GAEC 1, Soil Management, and GAEC 2, Supplementary Feeding, are specifically designed to protect soil. Failure to adhere to these requirements could lead to penalties being applied.

- DARD further encourages farmers to manage their land for environmental enhancement through their participation in agri-environment schemes. These voluntary schemes provide funding in return for undertaking sustainable farming practices which include measures aimed at improving soil quality.
- Development Advisers and Technologists at my Department's College, CAFRE, provide advice for farmers on land and soil quality improvements through press articles, awareness events and training courses. Training covers the topics of soil structure, nutrition, compaction and drainage. In the last 4 years CAFRE has delivered 161 courses on Nutrient Management to which 878 farmers have attended.
- Development Advisers also assist farmers with the interpretation of soil analysis and facilitate the processing of samples through laboratories. CAFRE has also developed and a suite of online calculators to help farmers work the amount of fertiliser they can apply to comply with legislative requirements.
- Financial support is available to farmers through the Farm Modernisation Programme. The list of items eligible for grant aid include equipment used for improving land and soil quality, for example: sub-soiler, soil aerator, rush control mulcher, soil pH meter, soil nitrogen meter and soil sampling kit.
- In addition financial support is also available through DARD's Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS). This provides capital grant support to help farmers to invest in advanced slurry spreading systems. This specialised equipment enables farmers to maximise efficient use of the nutrients contained in slurry/manures to improve soil fertility and reduce chemical fertiliser costs. The equipment also delivers a range of other productive and environmental benefits, including increased flexibility in timing of slurry spreading and reduced odour.

Rural Development Programme: Solar Energy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the requirements solar energy applications are required to meet in order to receive funding under the Rural Development Programme, in each Local Action Group area.
(AQW 19011/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme grant assistance may be provided for standalone renewable initiatives including the installation of Photovoltaic panels, hydro and wind or for projects where renewable energy technology is planned as part of the larger project. None of the energy produced may be used to reduce farm business or farm home domestic running costs ie 100% must be exported to the grid. This is a European Commission requirement.

Private promoters which include farmers and farm family members and rural micro businesses (less than10 employees) may be offered financial assistance at a rate of up to 50% of eligible costs up a maximum grant amount of £50,000. Social Economy Enterprises and Community Groups seeking to introduce renewable technologies can be funded at a rate of 75% of eligible costs up to a maximum grant amount of £170,000 depending on the measure applied to. A feasibility study is a Programme requirement and as an eligible cost may be supported through technical assistance at similar grant rates up to a maximum grant amount of £5,000.

Detailed guidance for renewable energy projects can be found at Appendix 25 of the Axis 3 Operating Rules on the DARD website at http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-dard-grants-and-funding/publications-grants-and-funding-axis-3-operating-rules.htm

Waterways: Jurisdiction

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, which Department's regulations, legislation or guidance takes precedence when waters that are within the remit of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure lie within the Loughs Agency's jurisdiction.
(AQW 19016/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Where DCAL waters lie within the Loughs Agency areas DCAL shall determine fishery specific regulations. These are given legal effect in the Loughs Agency jurisdictions by legislation made by Loughs Agency in consultation with and on behalf of DCAL. Guidance is provided by both bodies. The principle applying is that a fishery owner may wish to see more specific or more stringent regulations than apply in general legislation or byelaws. Those fishery specific regulations cannot be less stringent than the general legislation.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether discussions have commenced with trade union representatives regarding the departmental headquarters moving to Ballykelly or to detail when they are likely to begin.
(AQW 19067/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A departmental level committee was established in October 2011 to facilitate consultation with trade union representatives specifically regarding the departmental headquarters relocation programme. This is a formal committee established within the departmental Whitley arrangements which is the recognised consultation mechanism within the NI Civil Service.

There have been 5 meetings of this committee since I announced that Ballykelly was the preferred site. As the work on the business case is well under way the committee now meets on a monthly basis.

Other formal and informal discussions are held outside of these meetings to keep staff representatives apprised of developments and where practical issues require it. NIPSA have been invited to participate in the pre-consultation exercise being undertaken as part of the EQIA work and have contributed to the design of the staff survey on relocation.

The issues around the relocation of the DARD Headquarters to Ballykelly have also been subject to consultation at Central Whitley level.

Woodland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many hectares of land are covered by woodland in (i) North Down; and (ii) Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19174/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) There are approximately 950 hectares of woodland within the North Down Borough Council area.

(ii) Woodland cover in the north of Ireland is estimated to be 105,771 hectares.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18218/11-15, how many hectares of trees will need to be replanted as a result of Ash Dieback disease.
(AQW 19175/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Approximately 11 hectares of ash within Woodland Grant Scheme will require to be replanted to remain eligible for future Woodland Grant Scheme payments.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what sanctions can be imposed on people who are prosecuted for animal cruelty.
(AQW 19179/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The welfare of animals here is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. The 2011 Act recognises that causing unnecessary suffering to any animal is a very serious offence and the new stiffer penalties contained within the Act reflect this. The powers in the 2011 Act cover not just offences of unnecessary suffering, but also a wide range of other offences such as failing to provide for the welfare needs of the animal. The maximum penalties for animal welfare offences are 6 months imprisonment and/or a fine of £5,000 on summary conviction (Magistrate's Court); and 2 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine on conviction by indictment (High Court with jury).

In addition, the Court can deprive a person convicted of a serious animal welfare offence of ownership of the animal to which the offence related, should they be the owner. The Court can also disqualify a person, convicted of a serious animal welfare offence, for such a period as it sees fit, from owning, keeping, participating in the keeping, control or influencing the way an animal is kept. Such disqualification also stops a person from dealing in animals and from transporting, or arranging the transport, of animals. This disqualification could be for life, even for a first offence, and can be imposed in relation to animals generally, or to one or more species of animal. If the Court decides not to make an order to disqualify the person for cases brought forward under the 2011 Act, the Court must state its reason.

As the powers of disqualification in the 2011 Act are very extensive and cover not just ownership, but also the keeping or influencing the keeping of animals, the 2011 Act provisions prevent a person banned from keeping animals from simply transferring them to another family member. Where any person subsequently breaches a Court disqualification order, an offence will have been committed and that person would become liable to the penalties outlined above.

DARD: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether her Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19248/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) The Special Adviser has not made a declaration of interest.

(ii) The NICS HR Handbook sets out at section 6.01 the Standards of Conduct to which all Civil Servants must adhere. In respect of conflict of interest it states "where a conflict of interest arises, you must declare the interest to your Establishment/Personnel Division so that a decision can be made on the best way to proceed".

(iii) Not applicable (see response to (i) above).

Drainage Council

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much the Drainage Council has awarded in grants in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19260/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Drainage Council is constituted in line with the requirements of the Drainage (NI) Order 1973, and its status is that of an advisory non departmental public body which has no staff, budget or responsibility for the awarding of any grants. The primary function of the Drainage Council is in producing determinations on what watercourses are to be designated for maintenance and upkeep at public expense.

Meat Labelling and Traceability

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) who is responsible for investigating issues related to meat packaging and queries regarding labelling and traceability; (ii) when are her Department, the Food Standards Agency and Environmental Health informed of such investigations; (iii) what is a reasonable time scale for investigating such issues; and (iv) in addition to the recent case in at Freeza Meats, Newry, how many other investigations are taking place regarding labelling and traceability.
(AQW 19507/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i). The Food Standards Agency NI (FSA) is responsible for investigating issues related to meat packaging, and queries regarding labelling and traceability. The investigations are carried out by enforcement officers appointed by District Councils who carry out food safety and standards inspections in accordance with a Framework Agreement between the Councils and the FSA. Officers inspect food businesses in accordance with the Food Safety Code of Practice and Practice Guidance. Premises are inspected on a risk assessed basis.

DARD is responsible for enforcing the Beef Labelling legislation in abattoirs and approved cutting plants, which provides customers with assurance about the origin of beef at meat processors. District Councils enforce Beef Labelling legislation at retail level and cold stores on behalf of DARD, along with general food labelling regulations on processed meat products.

DARD is also responsible for meat hygiene official controls in approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments on behalf of the FSA.

(ii). If as a result of routine investigations the enforcement officers of the District Council identify a potential food safety incident, they are obliged to inform the Food Standards Agency in accordance with the FSA Incidents Response Protocol as soon as possible. An incident is defined as any event, where based on the information available, there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or quality of food and/or feed that could require intervention to protect consumer interests.

In regard to 'Beef Labelling' legislation, the principal responsibility for compliance rests with Food Business Operators. DARD undertakes a programme of risk based inspections in abattoirs and approved cutting plants and any non-compliances observed during these inspections are followed-up, and appropriate action taken as soon as possible.

(iii). Incidents are classified as either high, medium or low based on a classification matrix set out in the protocol. All incidents are immediately acted upon by FSA and details cascaded to those required to investigate further. Timescale in relation to investigation of an incident is dependent on complexity and scale of the issue. An incident investigation will not be closed until the FSA is satisfied that all necessary action has been taken to protect consumer interests.

(iv). There are currently no other investigations taking place regarding labelling and traceability.

Horse Passport System

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of reports that 70,000 horses are unaccounted for, what confidence can the public have in her Department's horse passport system.
(AQW 19732/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has no knowledge of the quoted figure of 70,000 unaccounted for horses but understands that the USPCA has now clarified that the 70,000 animals referred to in its statement covered a 5 year period on the island of Ireland. There are 35,615 horses registered to owners in the north of Ireland and at least 183,000 in the south. Assuming the USPCA figures can be extrapolated on the basis of the relative horse populations north & south, the number of horses alleged to be unaccounted for in the north of Ireland in any one year is therefore around 2,000.

The Horse Passport Regulations (NI) 2010, which are primarily to protect the human food chain, state that owners must obtain a passport for all horses. These regulations, on the identification of equidae, implement Commission Regulation (EC) No. 504/2008 in the north of Ireland. DARD enforces these Regulations at point of slaughter and at import / export at ports in the north of Ireland and will continue to keep these safeguards under review and make improvements as they present themselves.

Farm Safety

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent inquest into the deaths of the Spence family members, what action her Department is taking, in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive, to raise awareness of farm safety issues in regard to slurry and slurry pits.
(AQO 3391/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has joined with the Health & Safety Executive NI, the Ulster Farmers' Union, NI Agricultural Producers Association, National Farmers Union Mutual, and the Young Farmers Clubs for Ulster to form the Farm Safety Partnership, the aim of which is to reduce and, ultimately, eradicate all work related fatalities on farms.

The Partnership has recently launched a comprehensive Action Plan which will deliver on 4 Key areas:-

- Provision of Information and Promotion of Safe Working;
- Health and Safety Training;
- Motivating Good Practice and Discouraging Poor Practice; and
- Collection and Analysis of Information.

For its part the Health & Safety Executive NI has produced a new guidance leaflet for farmers on safe slurry handling. Over 10,000 leaflets have already been distributed to the farming community either directly by HSENI staff or partner organisations such as the UFU, NIAPA, and Young Famer's Clubs.

HSENI also has an ongoing programme of inspections across the north, which is designed to offer farmers advice and guidance on safe work practices including the safe handling of slurry. Over 1,000 farms having been visited since November last year. In addition to this HSENI staff has delivered numerous farm safety talks to farmers groups over recent months.

My Department plays its part in delivering the farm safe message in a number of ways.

Through locally based CAFRE Development Advisers information is distributed to farmers attending training events and workshops across the north. Currently the information being distributed is focussed on slurry mixing, including the dangers from gases, and safe use of machinery when mixing and spreading.

Also my Department is currently rolling out the FarmSafe Awareness course to 3,000 farmers across the north. The FarmSafe course covers the four key risk areas on the farms:-

- Tractors and Machinery;
- Livestock;
- Falls from Height; and
- Slurry.

The section of the course, dedicated to the management of slurry, covers its safe management in detail. This message is reinforced during the farm walk which includes examples of good, safe working practice in relation to the management of slurry.

Mountain Biking

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the assistance she has given to mountain biking in the Forest Service estate.
(AQO 3392/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This spring will see the opening of a further 66 kilometres of mountain biking trails on forestry land, developed and delivered in partnership with Newry and Mourne, Down, and Cookstown District Councils, and Outdoor Recreation NI, and paid for in large part by EU funding from the Tourist Board, the Sports Council and my own Department's Rural Development Division. This is in addition to the 34 kilometres already open and developed in partnership with the National Trust at Castleward.

This is a major achievement by the partners. The designs were complex, and took full account of the need to work and maintain the forests and protect them from erosion by excessive and inappropriate use; they were difficult to construct as, by definition, the trails are narrow and inaccessible, and I pay tribute to the contractors who are carrying out the work so that they are built to specification and will be delivered in time to support the World Police and Fire Games. And I especially want to recognise the commitment by local government to support their recreation and tourism objectives, as they will become the operating partner looking after the trails for many years to come.

I hope the Member will try the trails for himself!

Rose Energy

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact on the poultry industry following the rejection of the planning application for the Rose Energy project.
(AQO 3393/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The broiler poultry sector is a key part of our agri-food industry and an important contributor to the local economy. A by product of the sector is poultry litter and around 260,000 tonnes of it are produced each year. The

management and utilisation of poultry litter is an issue which cuts across the responsibilities of a number of government departments.

Traditionally, the local poultry industry has relied on spreading poultry litter on agricultural land as an organic fertiliser as its primary method for management. However, such practices are no longer sustainable at current levels. In short, there is not sufficient land available to use the nutrients in all the poultry litter that is produced here. In addition, there are regulatory obligations on the industry arising from the EU Nitrates, Water Framework and IPPC Directives to prevent pollution which must be met. Therefore, alternatives to land spreading are needed.

If long term sustainable solutions are not found, it has the potential to constrain the industry, both in terms of production and in supply of raw material to the processing sector.

I have been concerned about the lack of progress with alternative solutions for surplus poultry litter. Even if the Rose Energy planning application had been approved a legal challenge from objectors was highly likely. There would have been a further delay and no certainty that the project would ever proceed.

Therefore, over a year before the decision on the Rose Energy Planning application, I commissioned a review of poultry litter management options by my Department and the Agri-food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI). The review was published in April 2012.

The review highlighted that emerging technologies have developed in recent years and have potential. This is why, in December 2012, I together with the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment, launched the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) competition to explore the potential for these emerging technologies.

Phase 1 is the technical and commercial feasibility stage of the SBRI competition and contracts will be awarded, to those selected, in May 2013 for completion within 6 months. If Phase 1 identifies viable proposals for a Phase 2 to develop and evaluate prototypes, Phase 2 will commence in autumn 2013. There has been significant interest in the SBRI so far. By 4 February, 77 organisations had registered for the competition and applications close on 20 February.

Given the importance of finding a sustainable solution for poultry litter, I strongly believe that our poultry industry needs a sound evidence base to inform its future decisions. The outcomes from the SBRI competition will provide this.

Although the Rose Energy planning application has been refused, we already have a structured and managed process underway to progress alternatives through the SBRI.

Childcare Provision: Rural Areas

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to address the lack of childcare provision in rural areas.
(AQO 3394/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know DARD does not hold primary responsibility for Childcare service provision. However between 2009 and 2011, as part of our wider poverty and social inclusion work, the Department developed and implemented the Rural Childcare Programme. This was an innovative pilot programme which aimed to enhance the rural evidence base for the development of future policy and priorities in the area of rural childcare provision.

A composite evaluation of the programme was subsequently provided to OFMDFM to help influence the development of the new Childcare Strategy for the north. OFMDFM is taking the lead role in developing and co-ordinating the Strategy, working in partnership with other Government Departments which have lead responsibility for key policies relevant to childcare.

OFMDFM launched their 'Towards a Childcare Strategy' for consultation in December 2012. The consultation period closes on 5 March and I will continue to press for the need for the Strategy to take account of the very specific circumstances of rural areas.

I also want to look again at the achievements from our pilot programme and to give further consideration as to what more needs to be done in rural areas.

Badger Setts

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the timescale for the preliminary badger sett survey in the Banbridge/Rathfriland area.
(AQO 3396/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As I announced at the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on Tuesday 29 January 2013, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) have been commissioned to commence a badger sett survey in a 100km2 area between Banbridge and Rathfriland in County Down as soon as permissions from local farmers are obtained.

This badger sett survey is the next important step to help inform the design of the proposed "test and vaccinate or remove (TVR)" wildlife intervention research. The TVR approach would involve testing live badgers; vaccinating and releasing the test negative badgers; and removing the test positive ones. This wildlife intervention research would focus on removing diseased badgers and protecting uninfected ones. This balanced approach, which enjoys broad spectrum support from stakeholders, would avoid removal of uninfected badgers and it is hoped will lead to a reduction of TB levels in the badger population in the study area with a reduced capacity to transmit TB to other badgers and to cattle.

Badger sett surveying must be taken forward before foliage cover makes identifying the location of badger setts difficult. That is why it is being taken forward as a priority at this time. On 31 January 2013, my Department's Chief Veterinary Officer wrote to some 600 farmers in the 100km2 area between Banbridge and Rathfriland to ask them to give permission for AFBI staff to conduct a badger sett survey on their farm.

I am pleased that permission slips are already being returned. As a high level of farmer participation is absolutely vital to the badger sett survey, I would therefore encourage everyone who has received a letter from the Chief Veterinary Officer to return their permission slip in the pre-paid envelope provided as soon as possible.

Rural Watercourses

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to address the problem of waterlogged agricultural land.
(AQO 3397/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Drainage (NI) order 1973 grants permissive power to Rivers Agency to conduct maintenance on rural watercourses that have been designated for upkeep at public expense. The Rivers Agency operates an ongoing inspection and maintenance regime for rural watercourses based on a 6 year cycle and during the financial year 2011/2012 the Rivers Agency inspected and maintained some 1,200 kilometres of rural watercourses throughout the province.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the scores achieved against the defined set of criteria by the 23 local government districts for the relocation of her Department's headquarters.
(AQO 3398/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The process for identifying appropriate locations for my new headquarters was done in two stages – the first stage identified the 23 local government districts highlighted in the Spatial Framework of the Regional Development Strategy. These 23 areas were then scored against a set of 9 bespoke criteria. The scores for each of the 23 locations are as follows:-

Score of the 23 Potential Locations

Location	Score
Antrim	30
Ards	50
Armagh	44
Ballymena	35
Banbridge	57
Belfast	34
Carrickfergus	17
Castlereagh	20
Coleraine	37
Cookstown	53
Craigavon	49
Derry	51

Location	Score
Down	53
Dungannon	49
Fermanagh	41
Larne	45
Limavady	59
Lisburn	24
Newry & Mourne	56
Newtownabbey	21
North Down	23
Omagh	42
Strabane	73

Department of Education

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how the interests of the voluntary grammar sector will be represented on the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 18939/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The provisions in the Education Bill that provide for the membership of the Board of ESA reflect the Heads of Agreement published by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and were also agreed by the Executive. Those provisions preserve the established role of the Transferors and Trustees in membership of the administrations arrangement for education. No other sector has such rights at present and none are proposed for the Bill. There will also be four members appointed from the community

Education Support Services

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what form of mapping exercise will be put in place to ensure that all children in urban areas receive equal opportunities to support services.
(AQW 19037/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Support services in the form of Sure Start are not restricted to urban areas. Mapping exercises are not required as Sure Start is a targeted service which has a specific geographical remit. The current coverage is at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards and Super Output Areas in the north of Ireland, currently as defined by the Noble indicators MDM 2010. All children aged 0-4 and their families within the catchment area of each Sure Start can access services, as provision is universal within the targeted areas.

Services for children in need of support are not restricted to urban areas. The Department enables a range of programmes and services to be delivered to ensure that all disadvantaged children receive appropriate support, such as Free School Meals, Uniform Grants, and the Targeting Social Need element of the Schools' Budget, Full Service and Extended Schools. The focus of these interventions is on improving lives and longer term opportunities for children who may experience barriers to learning because of disadvantage.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what representation the Integrated sector will have on the board of the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 19128/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The provisions in the Education Bill that provide for the membership of the Board of ESA reflect the Heads of Agreement published by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and were also agreed by the Executive. Those provisions preserve the established role of the Transferors and Trustees in membership of the administrations arrangement for education. No other sector has such rights at present and none are proposed for the Bill. There will also be four members appointed from the community.

Education: Professional Qualification for Headship Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many Principals hold a Professional Qualification for Headship, broken down by (i) type; and (ii) sector.
(AQW 19186/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

1 Professional Qualification for Headship, Northern Ireland, PQH (NI) is a programme intended to provide training prior to appointment to a post as a school principal and has been in operation since 2000. However it is not a mandatory qualification. The first PQH(NI) graduates were in 2001. The tables below set out the information requested.

Table (i) Number of Principals working in school with a PQH qualification by school type, 2011

School Type	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Grammar	Special	Total
Number	87	249	61	35	17	**449**

Table (ii) Number of Principals working in schools with a PQH qualification by mangement type, 2011

Management Type	Controlled	Maintained	Voluntary	Grant Maintained Intergrated	Total
Number	223	187	22	17	**449**

Source: Regional Training Unit and Teachers' Pay and Pensions System

Notes to Tables (i) and (ii):

1 Figures are based on Principals working in schools during the week 21-25 November 2011.

2 Controlled includes Controlled and Controlled Integrated.

3 Maintained includes Catholic Maintained and other Maintained.

4 Figures exclude Acting Principals

Table (iii) Number of Principals with a PQH qualification by school type at year appointed as Principal

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	Total
Nursery & Primary	10	14	13	12	29	18	32	**128**
Post Primary	#	*	7	6	12	8	6	**48**

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	Total
Special	*	0	0	*	*	*	*	**9**

Table (iv) Number of Principals with a PQH qualification by management type at year appointed as Principal

	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	Total
Controlled	#	12	*	12	24	17	23	**103**
Maintained	6	6	14	7	15	10	15	**73**
Grant Maintained Integrated	0	0	*	*	*	0	*	**9**

Source: Regional Training Unit and Teachers' Pay and Pensions System

Notes to tables (iii) and (iv):

1 Year appointed is based on the academic year September to August.

2 Controlled includes Controlled and Controlled Integrated.

3 Maintained includes Catholic Maintained and other Maintained.

4 Figures exclude Acting Principals

5 Figures exclude Voluntary Grammar schools

6 Figures relate only to those who held PQH on appointment.

7 * Relates to fewer than 5 cases.

8 # Relates to figures which have been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Education: Professional Qualification for Headship Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many Principals were appointed in each of the last 7 years who held a Professional Qualification of Headship broken down by (i) type; and (ii) sector.
(AQW 19187/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

2 Professional Qualification for Headship, Northern Ireland, PQH (NI) is a programme intended to provide training prior to appointment to a post as a school principal and has been in operation since 2000. However it is not a mandatory qualification. The first PQH(NI) graduates were in 2001. The tables below set out the information requested.

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Special	*	0	0	*	*	*	*	**9**

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Grant Maintained Integrated	0	0	*	*	*	0	*	9

Source: Regional Training Unit and Teachers' Pay and Pensions System

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2 Controlled includes Controlled and Controlled Integrated.

3 Maintained includes Catholic Maintained and other Maintained.

4 Figures exclude Acting Principals

5 Figures exclude Voluntary Grammar schools

6 Figures relate only to those who held PQH on appointment.

7 * Relates to fewer than 5 cases.

8 # Relates to figures which have been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the Pre-School Pilot project A in 2011, to detail (i) the criteria used to decide which children took part in the pilot; and (ii) whether any children suggested for the pilot were later denied participation.
(AQW 19196/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Special Educational Needs (SEN) pilot in early years' settings provides additional supports to some Department of Education-funded statutory and non-statutory providers for children in their immediate pre-school year. As a pilot not all settings or children will have access to the pilot supports. Where a setting is not part of the pilot any SEN child who requires access to Education and Library Board (ELB) services will be managed through the normal arrangements. An independent evaluation of the pilot will inform the development of an appropriate model of future supports from both early years' settings and ELBs.

(i) Within the parameters of the pilot, each ELB implemented a model, based on their professional judgement of greatest need in their area. Settings, rather than children, were identified by ELBs to participate in the pilot. The models developed differ across the ELBs with some focusing on particular types of SEN such as: Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN); or Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD).

Once within a pilot, it will be the setting that identifies children requiring pilot supports, with parental consent as appropriate. The criteria used by each ELB to identify settings were as follows:

ELB	Criteria used by ELB to identify pilot settings
NEELB	All pre-school settings were ranked in order of social deprivation using the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 60 settings with the highest ranks were offered the opportunity to participate in the pilot 32 settings chose to participate in the pilot

ELB	Criteria used by ELB to identify pilot settings
BELB	Pre-school settings: Expression of interest Number of referrals for ASD, SLCN and SEBD over the previous 3 years Setting not involved in many other initiatives All education sectors to be represented All parts of the city to be represented Playgroups: Numbers of children attending Social deprivation Geographical spread
SELB/WELB	Offered to 20 SLCN and 20 SEBD settings in each ELB; 80 pre-schools classes in total. Statistical analysis of data on SEN and social need was accessed from the Department of Education. Consultation with Southern and Western Health and Social Care Trusts to identify areas of need. Consultation with the Early Years Organisation to identify specific areas that would benefit from participation. The SELB/WELB Early Years Steering Group, on the basis of the information gathered, made the decision to target specific areas for the pilot, including geographical clustering.
SEELB	The SEELB pilots relate to ASD and SEBD. In school year 2011/12 the pilots supported all nurseries and funded playgroups. This model was re-aligned in school year 2012/13 to provide focused support to 44 pre-school settings. All those settings which had received individual support for pupils during 2011/12 year were offered a place in 2012/13. (2 settings declined.) Social Deprivation index was obtained for all SEELB Nursery Schools, Nursery Units and PEAG Playgroups. SEELB Pre-school settings were categorised according to their geographical area and whether they were urban or rural. All SEELB Nursery Schools, Nursery Units and Playgroups were categorised as Controlled, Maintained, Integrated, Reception Class or Irish Medium. Considered which categories the Pre-school Settings that received support for individual pupils in 2011/12 fell into (i.e. Social Deprivation, geographical area, urban/rural, Controlled, Maintained, Integrated, Irish Medium.) Gaps in each of these categories were identified. Nursery Schools, Nursery Units and PEAG playgroups, which had only attended training provided by the Project during 2011/12 and also fell within the “gap” categories were identified and offered a place in 2012/13. Most accepted. A very small number of settings, which had not engaged in the Project during 2011/12 were offered a place for 2012/13 in order to fill all categories and ensure that the SEELB target settings were representative of the range of pre-school settings within the Board.

(ii) In response to the second part of the question, the ELBs have advised as follows:

ELB	Whether any children were denied participation
NEELB	All pupils with SEN enrolled in the pilot settings may benefit from participation. There are no exclusions
BELB	No children appropriately referred within the scope of pilot have been denied participation.
SELB/WELB	The SELB and WELB are not aware of any pupil who has been excluded from participation where settings are still part of the pilot.

ELB	Whether any children were denied participation
SEELB	Under the pilot in 2011/12 only those children whose difficulties related to areas of need covered by the pilots (ASD or SEBD) were supported through the pilots. Under the school year 2012/13 procedures, the SEELB is not aware of any children suggested for focused support who have been denied participation.

Education Support Services

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the findings of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit review into the regionalisation of support services.
(AQW 19207/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit carried out an initial report examining the scope for operational efficiencies in a range of education services and two more detailed reports examining the scope for cost reduction in home to school transport and school catering services.

A key finding of all three reports was that there was often variation in practice and in costs across the Education & Library Boards. A central theme of the reports was the scope to improve value for money by operating services on a more consistent basis, learning from and applying good practice that already exists within some ELBs and best practice from elsewhere.

The establishment of ESA will require the design and delivery of support services that operate consistently across all parts of the north. This provides an early opportunity to address unnecessary variations in practice and to apply learning and best practice in line with the recommendations of PEDU. That work is now being taken forward.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the projected job losses following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority; and (ii) the projected final staffing levels of the Authority.
(AQW 19208/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Implementation of the new ESA structure will be carried out in a managed way and is likely to take several years to complete. When implementation is complete it is expected that ESA will have fewer staff than are currently employed in the organisations it will subsume, particularly at senior and middle management levels. This work is being developed by the Full Business Case for ESA which shall be completed shortly.

Donacloney Primary School

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education when he will make a decision in relation to the proposed expansion of Donacloney Primary School from eight classes to nine.
(AQW 19289/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Development Proposal (DP) No'279, which proposes an increase in the size of Donacloney Primary Schools from eight class bases to nine class bases, was published by the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) on 15 October 2012. Once a DP is published, a statutory 2-month consultation period then ensues, during which anyone who wishes to express an opinion may do so directly to DE. At the end of the 2-month period I make a decision on the proposal taking account of all the pertinent issues and the comments received.

I note that the consultation period for DP No'279 ended on 15 December 2012. DE officials have, however, been working with the SELB to clarify a number of issues but unfortunately, some of these remain unresolved.

The Board has therefore been asked for further comment as a matter of urgency and a response is expected shortly. Subject to the outstanding issues being resolved satisfactorily, officials will then finalise the recommendation and submit to me for my consideration. I expect therefore to be in a position to take a decision in respect of DP No'279 in the very near future.

Schools: Shared Principal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail which schools have a shared Principal.
(AQW 19315/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: St Therese Nursery School, Belfast has a shared Principal.

Schools: Admission Criteria

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education to outline the power, statutory or otherwise, under which his Department, or any Education and Library Board, can remove a school's right to set its own entrance criteria, including the right to select on the basis of academic merit if it so chooses.
(AQW 19316/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The admissions criteria used by any school are a matter for the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors of every school has a statutory duty to set admissions criteria capable of distinguishing between applicants down to the last available place.

If a school attempts to publish criteria that are not capable of distinguishing between applicants down to the last available place, and it has not been possible to resolve the matter through any other means, the Department has the power to direct the school to change its criteria in a manner that will enable the school to meet this statutory duty.

Killowen and Millburn Primary Schools

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education when Killowen Primary and Millburn Primary Schools in Coleraine will be included on any future Capital Build Programme.
(AQW 19345/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that Killowen and Milburn Primary Schools will be disappointed not to be included in my recent capital investment announcement.

The projects I announced on 22 January were determined as priorities by the relevant Managing Authority and as certain to perform part of area solutions for the future schools estate.

While the recent announcement I have made in no way implies that other schools, including Killowen and Millburn Primary Schools, will not be considered at a later stage, I will only announce capital projects which I believe can be delivered within a reasonable timeframe.

Moving forward I will work with the Managing Authorities to identify priority projects emerging from area plans.

Reading Recovery Programme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education how Reading Recovery Tutors, who were trained by the Reading Recovery National Network, are utilised to disseminate good practice in primary schools.
(AQW 19354/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department (DE) provided substantial financial support for the Reading Recovery programme from 1998/99 to 2007/08. During this period over 600 teachers were trained in Reading Recovery strategies by Reading Recovery tutors in the Education and Library Boards (the Boards). When funding ended in 2008 a number of schools continued to provide Reading Recovery from within their delegated budget, utilising teachers previously trained in Reading Recovery techniques.

When funding ended the Reading Recovery tutors in the Boards no longer had access to the Reading Recovery National Network and were therefore no longer licensed to provide Reading Recovery training. Some Boards still have trained tutors within their staff and these officers are now engaged in providing support and training in the areas of literacy and school improvement.

Schools: Reception and Nursery Classes

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's definition of a (i) reception class; and (ii) nursery class.
(AQW 19361/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Definitions are provided within Article 18, Paragraph 4, of the Education (NI) Order 1997.

"Reception class" means a class in which education is provided which is suitable to the requirements of children aged four and any pupils over that age whom it is expedient to educate together with pupils of that age.

"Nursery class" means a class in which education is provided which is suitable to the requirements of children who have attained the age of two but have not attained the lower limit of compulsory school age.

Schools: Reception and Nursery Classes

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) maximum; and (ii) actual enrolment figures for each (a) nursery; and (b) reception class in 2012/13, broken down by Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 19363/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged to have the information requested placed in the Assembly Library.

Education: PIRLS and TIMMS

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the accuracy of the (i) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; and (ii) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.
(AQW 19364/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are major international surveys conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and I have been assured that both surveys are subject to rigorous technical standards.

I understand that numerous quality assurance steps and procedures are implemented by all those involved in the PIRLS and TIMSS assessment, including the TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, the IEA Secretariat, the IEA Data Processing and Research Center, Statistics Canada, Educational Testing Service, and the National Research Coordinators and their teams in the participating countries.

I am therefore confident that the results of PIRLS and TIMSS are reliable and valid and that we should celebrate and strive to build on the success of our primary schools.

Teachers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many teachers are currently employed in schools across Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19420/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The latest available information indicates that schools across the north of Ireland employed 3,616 teachers in a temporary capacity and 15,979 teachers in a permanent capacity. These figures do not include teachers in Voluntary Grammar Schools for whom the Department does not hold information.

C2K Broadband

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Education (i) how much the installation of the C2K Fibre programme has cost to date; (ii) what is the completion date of the programme; and (iii) how much of the budget remains.
(AQW 19422/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

i) The cost of C2k Broadband installation for the 67% of schools deployed to date remains consistent with the corresponding percentage of budget allocated for this purpose.

ii) The completion date of the programme is currently projected to be 31st May 2013. This date is subject to satisfactory agreement to additional digging and construction work by schools and Education and Library Boards where necessary.

iii) The cost of installing C2k Broadband in the remaining 33% of schools remains consistent with the corresponding percentage of budget allocated for this purpose.

It is not possible to identify the specific contract cost of delivery of enhanced broadband to our schools, as this is part of the wider contract, which includes many elements. The type of contract in place for delivery of improved ICT services to schools is called a 'packaged managed service' and the level of cost relates directly to the services that are needed and are to be provided. Examples of services include the delivery of much enhanced broadband to all of our schools, as well as WiFi in schools, new software, including a portal called 'My School', a helpdesk service that operates from 7am to 7pm each week day etc. To provide this specific breakdown of parts of the service would be considered to be a breach of 'commercial in confidence' agreements between the contractor and their partners.

C2K Broadband

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Education how much of the C2K Fibre programme has been implemented to date; and whether any schools or Boards of Governors have declined installation.
(AQW 19424/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: To date, 746 schools out of an overall total of 1,116 schools (67% of all schools) have received their C2k Broadband enhancement. No schools or Boards of Governors have declined installation up to this point.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new school building for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.
(AQW 19426/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that Bangor Central Integrated Primary School will be disappointed not to be included in my recent capital investment announcement, and the process in no way implies that other school projects will not be considered at a later stage.

The reality is that the budget settlement for this Spending Review period means that the need for investment far exceeds the funds available.

I will continue to petition to secure the additional funds to address the difficulties faced in many schools.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether the Special Educational Needs review, and any resulting changes to regulations, will retain the provision detailed within part 3 sub section 2 that a statement of Special Educational Needs should be specific, detailed and quantified.
(AQW 19429/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN) includes guidance for Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on the completion of statements. Paragraph 4.21 of the Code provides guidance on how the special educational provision should be set out by the Education and Library Board in part 3, sub section 2 of a statement. The guidance states that this sub-section should "normally be specific, detailed and quantified".

The form, which a statement should take, is currently set out in Part B of the Schedule of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations (NI) 2005. These Regulations refer to what the ELBs should specify in the statement, but do not use the terms "specific, detailed and quantified".

Revised Regulations are yet to be drafted and all amendments to existing Regulations or new provisions will be consulted upon. The overall intention will be to ensure that the arrangements set out are in the child's interests, that provision is made as soon after assessment as necessary, and that a less bureaucratic framework can allow for the changing needs of children.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, given that the Special Educational Needs (SEN) code of practice states that provision detailed within part 3 sub section 2 of a statement of SEN should normally be specific, detailed and quantified, whether each Education and Library Board ensures such quantification and specification in a statement.
(AQW 19430/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Part IV paragraph 4.21 of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (COP) states that Part 3 subsection 2 of a statement of special educational needs (SEN) should normally be specific, detailed and quantified although there will be cases where flexibility should be retained in order to meet the changing special educational needs of the child concerned.

The Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that, where appropriate, ELBs ensure that the provision detailed in part 3 subsection 2 of statements of special educational needs (SEN) is specific, detailed and quantified by:-

1 Adhering to the guidelines outlined in the COP, including specification pertaining to;
- the appropriate educational setting which has been recommended;
- any additional support required to meet the pupils' individual needs;
- access to a range of ELB services e.g. the Sensory Support Service, the Autism Advisory and Intervention Service or the Specific Learning Difficulties and Behaviour Support team etc.

2 Employing skilled and experienced officers to write statements;

3 Providing on-going training, support and supervision for these officers;

4 Seeking updated advice from parents/stakeholders when writing or amending statements;

5 Seeking clarification from advice givers should there be any ambiguities in their reports;

6 Carefully considering of all information gathered and the needs of children on an individual basis.

Specific details relating to teaching programmes and approaches, experiences, opportunities or modifications required, special examination provision and appropriate facilities and equipment are also detailed within the appendices to the statement when appropriate.

ELBs have also advised that in a small number of cases flexibility in relation to quantification and specification is required in order to meet the changing SEN of the child concerned.

Schools: Reception Classes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools in North Down have reception classes; and how many pupils attend each class.
(AQW 19448/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Two schools in the North Down constituency have reception pupils in 2012/13. In both these cases, the reception pupils are integrated into a Year 1 class. Information relating to the number of reception pupils in the schools concerned and the total number of children in the class of which they are a part, is detailed in the table below.

Primary schools located in the North Down constituency that have reception pupils, 2012/13

School name	Number of reception pupils	Total pupils in class of which reception pupils are a part
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	5	18
St Patrick's Primary School, Holywood	4	23

Source: School census

Note:

1 Figures included are provisional and may be subject to minor revision once the Education and Library Boards' auditing process is complete. Finalised figures will be available at the end of February.

Business Education Partnerships

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education whether any Business Education Partnerships (BEP) exist in South Down; and to outline the benefits of BEPs to pupils and young people.
(AQW 19455/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education currently funds 13 Business Education Partnerships (BEPs) across the north to run a variety of employability, enterprise and career events. Currently the Down and Banbridge BEPs cover the South Down Area within their delivery programmes.

BEPs are voluntary organisations made up of staff from local schools from a particular geographic area, together with staff from local employers and members of the business and wider community. Individuals working in BEPs do so on a voluntary basis.

BEPs enable local teachers to develop and deliver employability and enterprise projects to meet the specific needs of their pupils and programmes are delivered in partnership with local employers which enable schools and local businesses to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

BEPs run a variety of employability, enterprise and careers type events e.g. careers conventions, work experience activities, interview skills and workplace visits, and have as their aim the development and facilitation of business education activities, aligned to the revised curriculum. The benefits for pupils include enhanced insight and information into the world of work in order to make informed career choices, better understanding of employability skills, entrepreneurship skills, interview skills and personal development skills such as confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

Schools: New Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 14378/11-15, when each of the new schools will open.
(AQW 19468/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The design and planning work, which is still ongoing and required for all these projects to enable them to reach tender approval /construction stage is a complex process which also involves a number of statutory approvals. As such, at this stage in the overall design process it is still not possible to give definitive opening dates for any of these projects.

DE: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19484/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education spent £19k on hospitality in 2011/12.

Roddensvale School

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education why the earmarked allocation for Roddensvale School in Larne has reduced from £20,878 in 2006/07 to £7,000 in 2012/13; and whether a reduction replicated across all special schools.
(AQW 19557/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The earmarked allocation to Roddensvale School was made up of the following initiatives:

- Extended Schools;
- SEN COP(Special Educational Needs Code of Practice); and
- Direct Addition to Special Schools.

The reduction from £20,878 in 2006-07 to £7,000 in 2012-13 occurred due to the following:

- The cessation of extended schools earmarked funding, as the school no longer met the criteria to receive this funding from 2008-09. The allocation for this in 2006-07 and 2007-08 was £12,420;
- The cessation of SEN Code of Practice Funding by my Department from 2010-11. The allocation for this in 2006-07 was £5,308;
- The Direct Addition to Special Schools budget increased from £3,150 in 2006-7 to £7,000 in 2012-13;

Any reductions mentioned above will be either due to the school no longer meeting the necessary criteria (Extended Schools), or the funding ceasing across all schools (SEN COP).

Schools: Energy Costs

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to outline measures that his Department has taken to assist schools in lowering their energy costs.
(AQW 19558/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The purchase of Energy for schools is managed by a joint grouping of Procurement Professionals and Energy Officers on behalf of all Education & Library Board estates. Energy commodities are purchased at a market price, with suppliers being paid a margin for profit and delivery only.

The ELB Energy Officers are responsible for purchasing oil, natural gas, liquid petroleum gas, electricity and water utilities on behalf of the estate at the most beneficial cost for schools. This collective purchasing power ensures that the cost of the energy supply for schools is kept to a minimum, releasing funding for other priorities.

Since 2000/01, significant ELB investment in plant conversions has increased the area of the estate heated by natural gas from virtually zero to around one third, resulting in an estimated saving of £8m and a reduction in CO2 emissions of some 65,000 tonnes.

Following the emergence of the single electricity market across the island of Ireland in 2007, ELB Energy Officers recently implemented a contract for the supply of electricity for the schools estate and it is anticipated that this will deliver savings of approximately 10% or £1.6m against baseline figures.

The ELB Energy Officers have also taken steps to monitor and reduce water usage and waste in schools, to install a range of renewable energy systems and to upgrade the estate through energy saving schemes, all of which contribute to reducing the usage and thus the cost of energy for schools.

Schools: Reception Classes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which reception classes in North Down are currently awaiting a decision on an application to become a nursery unit.
(AQW 19564/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are currently no proposals with my Department for any reception class in North Down to become a nursery unit.

DE: Public Appointments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW14678/11-15, for an update on the current situation.
(AQW 19581/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As a result of the breaches identified by the Commissioner for Public Appointments, I tasked my Permanent Secretary with carrying out a review to establish how these breaches occurred and to ensure that lessons were learned and systems improved so that there can be no risk of recurrence.

The review has been completed and the Department has agreed an Action Plan which addresses the shortcomings in the process which were identified. Advice has also been promulgated to all Directorates within my Department.

In addition, my Department is represented on an Inter-Departmental Working Group on Public Appointments. Its role is to identify risks and challenges for Departments in making public appointments, to disseminate good practice and to ensure greater compliance with the Commissioner's Code of Practice.

Education: Computer-based Assessments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW15217/11-15, for an update on the current situation.
(AQW 19583/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I wrote to schools on 12 November to advise them that I was satisfied that the main technical difficulties associated with the computer based assessments (CBA) had been addressed. I also stated that I expected them to continue with the assessments before the end of term.

In agreement with the suppliers of NINA and NILA, CCEA wrote to schools on 20 December advising that the assessment period had been extended until 11 January, allowing schools additional time to complete the assessments.

CCEA has confirmed that 96% of the NINA (Numeracy) assessments and 95% of the NILA (Literacy) assessments in student terms have been completed.

Standardised outcomes will be released to schools shortly.

Going forward, I have agreed to a 4-part review of computer based assessment being undertaken by my Department. The review will encompass:

- A review by CCEA of the particular problems reported and how they will be addressed;
- A review by ETI to establish the value and use to which schools put the assessments;

- An independent review of the technical problems encountered this year, to establish why they occurred and how they can be avoided in future; and
- A review by DE of the CBA policy.

Educational Psychologists: Waiting Times

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) what is the longest waiting time from the point of initial referral to an appointment with an education psychologist in the South Eastern Education and Library Board during the last 12 months; and (ii) what steps he has taken to clear the backlog of children waiting to see an educational psychologist since this issue was identified during Question Time in September 2012.
(AQW 19594/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has advised that the longest waiting time from initial referral to an appointment with an educational psychologist for children who had an appointment in the period 1 February 2012 to 31 January 2013, in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, is 23 months.

The child in question was referred for an appointment with an educational psychologist before starting school but subsequent consultation with the school indicated that the child was showing progress since starting school. The case was therefore managed to establish if the child continued to make progress while retaining the option of an individual appointment with an educational psychologist which was necessary at a later date.

Since the issue of the backlog of children waiting to see an educational psychologist in the SEELB was highlighted during Question Time in September 2012, I understand that the SEELB has taken the following steps to address this:-

a) Pre-school Referrals

On 10th September 2012, SEELB Educational Psychology and Special Education departments met with colleagues from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to review practices and protocols to address the needs of pre-school children with developmental or potential educational difficulties. As a result, revised protocols are currently being piloted for the joint working of Education and Health professionals, in Child Development Clinics and Autism Assessment Clinics, regarding the needs of pre-school children with developmental or potential educational difficulties. One of the main aims of this pilot initiative is to reduce waiting times for those pre-school children in the Board's area who require an appointment with an Educational Psychologist.

b) School-age Referrals

The SEELB identified the referrals backlog as a priority for the 2012/13 school year and devised a strategy to address this issue, with the target that by 30th June 2013, no child will have been waiting more than six school months for an appointment with an Educational Psychologist. The Chief Executive has written to all school principals setting out the Board's strategy and promoting a partnership approach with schools to achieve a significant reduction in waiting times for Educational Psychology Services. As the majority of new referrals of school-age children originate from primary schools, the senior managers of the Educational Psychology Service have also met with local primary principals' groups to clarify the strategy for addressing the referrals backlog and to promote the partnership approach towards the achievement of the set target by the end of the present school year.

c) Recruitment of Educational Psychologists

The number of educational psychologists available for assessments was considerably affected by recruitment difficulties during the 2011/12 school year. Although six Educational Psychologists took up employment on temporary contracts with SEELB in September 2012, two subsequently left at the end of December 2012 to take up employment elsewhere. SEELB is currently seeking to recruit educational psychologists to fill these vacancies as a matter of urgency.

The Board has also recruited one Psychology Assistant, and is seeking to recruit a second, to assist with assessments under the supervision of an educational psychologist.

School Closures

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the schools that have been approved for closure in each of the last ten years, broken down by (i) sector; and (ii) type.
(AQW 19599/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A chronological list of the schools that have closed in the last ten school years is provided in the table below. The table records the school sector and type as requested.

School closures (between 2002/03 and 2011/12 school years)

School ref	School	ELB area	Type	Management (Sector)	Date of closure
103-6550	St Patrick's Primary School	BELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/03
201-1878	Earl of Erne Primary School	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/03

School ref	School	ELB area	Type	Management (Sector)	Date of closure
201-6592	Maydown and Strathfoyle Primary School	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/03
203-2733	St Joseph's Primary School, Lisconrea	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/03
221-0049	Templemore Secondary School	WELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/03
242-0229	Foyle and Londonderry College Prep Dept	WELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/03
501-2445	Toberlane Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/03
301-0803	Ballypriormore Primary School	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/12/03
111-0004	Frederick Street Nursery School	BELB	Nursery	Controlled	31/08/04
111-6156	Denmark Street Nursery School	BELB	Nursery	Controlled	31/08/04
301-0824	Ballyrock Primary School, Bushmills	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/04
303-2102	Brackalislea Primary School, Desertmartin	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/04
561-0057	Lurgan College Prep Dept	SELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/04
203-2680	St Mary's Primary School, Laught	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/05
301-6010	Antiville Primary School, Larne	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/05
501-6169	Granville Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/05
561-0067	Portadown Prep Dept	SELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/05
201-1900	Stragowna Primary School, Enniskillen	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
101-0247	Mersey Street Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
301-0722	Lisnamurrican Primary School, Broughshane	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
301-3327	Glenarm Primary School	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
303-2266	St Mary's Primary School, Aghadowey	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/06
311-6161	Larne Nursery School	NEELB	Nursery	Controlled	31/08/06
321-0292	Massereene Community College, Antrim	NEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/06
501-1114	Ardmore Primary School, Derryadd	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
501-1655	Loughbrickland Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/06
503-6021	All Saints Primary School, Ballela, Banbridge	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/06
121-0273	Mount Gilbert Community College, Belfast	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/07
223-0141	St Joseph's High School, Plumbridge	WELB	Secondary	Maintained	31/08/07
301-6226	Ballyduff Primary School, Newtownabbey	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
311-6019	Ballycastle Nursery School	NEELB	Nursery	Controlled	31/08/07
401-1508	Charley Memorial Primary School, Dunmurry	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
401-1627	Lambeg Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
401-1648	Hillhall Primary School, Lisburn	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
401-1686	Drumbo Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
401-3001	Groomsport Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
403-3029	St Mary's Primary School, Ballygowan	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/07
431-6546	The Lindsay Hospital School, Belfast	SEELB	Special	Controlled	31/08/07
501-1618	Tullymacarette Primary School, Dromora	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07
501-2616	Eglish Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07

School ref	School	ELB area	Type	Management (Sector)	Date of closure
104-6654	Gaelscoil an Damba, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Irish Medium	31/08/08
121-0288	Balmoral High School, Belfast	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08
123-0032	St Gabriels College, Belfast	BELB	Secondary	Maintained	31/08/08
201-1866	Shanmullagh Primary School, Ballinamallard	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
201-2709	Trillick PS, Omagh	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
401-3032	Conlig Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
403-1295	Guiness Primary School, Ballynahinch	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/08
405-3016	Kindle Integrated PS, Tyrella, Ballykinlar,	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
421-0030	Lisnasharragh High School, Belfast	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08
425-0272	Down Academy, Downpatrick	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08
501-0988	Collone Primary School, Armagh	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
501-6109	Minterburn Primary School, Caledon	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08
405-0618	Hilden Controlled Integrated Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	30/11/08
403-1693	St Colman's PS, Moira	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/03/09
101-0863	Suffolk Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09
121-0258	Castle High School, Belfast	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09
133-6012	St Francis De Sales Special School, Belfast	BELB	Special	Maintained	31/08/09
203-2679	St Columba's PS Curley, Dromore	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09
203-2716	St Patrick's PS Garvallagh, Seskinore	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09
321-0090	Maghera High School	NEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09
401-1610	Newtownbreda Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09
421-0031	Donaghadee High School	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09
501-2451	Benburb Primary School, Dungannon	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09
503-1155	St Colmcille's PS, Armagh	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09
526-0307	Armagh Integrated College	SELB	Secondary	GMI	31/08/09
203-2681	St Patrick's PS, Creggan	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/10
301-6171	Ballee Primary School Ballymena	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/10
503-1658	St John's Primary School, Glenn	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/10
101-0271	Beechfield Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	30/09/10
101-0283	Grove Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	15/10/10
101-0321	Vere Foster PS, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11
113-6302	St Paul's Nursery School, Belfast	BELB	Nursery	Maintained	31/08/11
162-0018	Bloomfield Collegiate Prep Dept	BELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/11
303-0836	Braid Primary School, Broughshane	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/11
303-6093	Lourdes Primary School, Whitehead	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/11
401-1678	Ballycloughan Primary School, Saintfield	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11
401-3309	Derriaghy Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11
462-0015	Connor House Prep Dept, Bangor GS	SEELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/11

School ref	School	ELB area	Type	Management (Sector)	Date of closure
501-2659	Clogher Regional Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11
203-2664	St Davog's Primary School, Scraghey	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/12
303-0713	Carlane Primary School, Toomebridge	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/12
401-1647	Ballykeigle Primary School, Comber	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/12
401-1688	Redburn Primary School, Holywood	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/12
421-0194	Dunmurry High School	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/12
501-1034	Aghavilly Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/12
501-6028	Keady Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/12
231-0029	Altnagelvin Hospital School	WELB	Special	Controlled	30/09/12

Educational Needs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for which minority groups, excluding Travellers, his Department has undertaken significant work to determine and address educational needs.
(AQW 19619/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department undertakes significant work to support the additional educational needs of pupils such as Newcomers, School Aged Mothers (SAMs), Looked After Children (LAC) and Services children. A range of policy initiatives and funding seek to build the capacity of schools to ensure these pupils can access the curriculum and get involved in every aspect of school life.

Education: Common Funding Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of each of the recommendations contained in the report of the Independent Panel which reviewed the Common Funding Scheme.
(AQW 19621/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I intend to take time to consider carefully each one of the recommendations and, informed by these, I will bring forward my response to the report and my own proposals for reform of the Common Funding Scheme in due course.

Education: Review of GCSEs and GCE A Levels

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how he intends to proceed with his review of GCSE and A Levels in light of the decision by the Education Secretary to abandon his plans for an English Baccalaureate.
(AQW 19720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The fundamental review of GCSEs and GCE A levels here will proceed in line with the Terms of Reference I announced to the Assembly in October 2012. This will not change following the latest announcement by Michael Gove on decisions taken in England.

A final report is due in June 2013, following two interim reports in January and March. I will consider the evidence based on the final report, and I will make decisions on the way forward here in the best interests of all learners.

Department for Employment and Learning

Unemployment: North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he plans to address unemployment in North Down, particularly in the Conlig, Clandeboye and Harbour wards.
(AQW 19173/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department is committed to reducing unemployment for all individuals across Northern Ireland, irrespective of where they live. Bangor JobCentre, which covers the Conlig, Clandeboye and Harbour wards, offers a range of services, initiatives and programmes to help jobseekers find employment, particularly people who are unemployed, individuals with disabilities and those with other barriers to work. Services include job search, help with writing a CV or job application form, preparing for interviews, careers guidance, or help with travel costs for job interviews.

Steps to Work (StW) programme

All unemployed clients in the North Down area can participate in the StW programme, which is the Department's main adult return to work programme. The aim of StW is to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment.

Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, Bangor JobCentre placed 389 StW clients into employment. From 1 April 2012 to date, 282 StW clients have been placed into employment in North Down. There are currently 606 clients from North Down on the StW programme and of these 155 are from the 3 aforementioned wards (approximately 25.6%).

First Start

A new initiative has recently been implemented within the StW programme known as 'First Start'. Between now and 2014, First Start will support 1,700 waged employment opportunities across Northern Ireland, each lasting a minimum of six months, for young people aged 18 to 24 who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for at least six months.

Youth Employment Scheme (YES)

In March last year the Executive agreed a package of new measures, incorporating the Youth Employment Scheme, to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment.

In the past few months my Department has been actively working with employers to secure opportunities across Northern Ireland. I have been delighted by the response of employers in the North Down area so far and I expect many more to come forward to offer opportunities for young people in the coming months. We are now focusing our efforts on the young unemployed and are encouraging them to participate in the Scheme.

Pathways to Work

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people with health conditions and disabilities move into employment.

YMCA Craft Programme

Last September, a programme entitled C.R.A.F.T. (Careers Related Advice and Further Training), which is a joint initiative between my Department, North Down YMCA and the South Eastern Regional College (SERC), was piloted in the Bangor area. 11 young people in the 18-24 year old cohort participated in this programme and the outcomes were very positive. The C.R.A.F.T. programme comprises an 8 week structured programme of Careers Guidance Clinics, Employment Adviser liaison and a series of personal development and training opportunities provided by SERC and the North Down YMCA. Following the success of the pilot programme another CRAFT programme commenced on 4th February 2013.

Other Departmental training programmes, such as Apprenticeships NI and Training for Success, are also available across Northern Ireland. These opportunities are open to eligible people from all areas and staff at the Bangor Jobcentre can provide advice on all of the programmes and initiatives available.

DEL: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19300/11-15)

Dr Farry: Special Advisers are contractually required to abide by the conduct provisions in the NICS HR Handbook with the exception of the rules on political activities, as per Standards of Conduct Section 6.01: "Where a conflict of interest arises, you must declare the interest to your Establishment/Personnel Division so that a decision can be made on the best way to proceed." Special Advisers are treated the same as civil servants in this regard.

All staff in my Department are required to notify the Establishment Officer/Senior Business Partner if they wish to undertake any secondary paid or unpaid employment to ensure compliance with the requirements in the HR Handbook. Human Resources holds a database of this information. The Department does not open this information to public inspection. The database contains personal data as defined in the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). Disclosure of such information is likely to breach the first and sixth principles of the DPA.

Prior to appointment, my current temporary Special Adviser notified the Department of his secondary occupation as a Councillor. His duties as a Councillor do not preclude him from undertaking his role as my Special Adviser. The details on the secondary occupation are recorded on the database held by Human Resources.

DEL Budget: Adults with Learning Disabilities

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of his Departmental budget is spent on young adults with (i) learning difficulties; and (ii) severe learning difficulties, in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 19312/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each of my Department's operational divisions provides significant levels of support to those people with disabilities that require assistance in overcoming barriers to employment or to learning. Unfortunately, information on all relevant departmental spend, broken down to the degree set out in this question, is not readily available. To extract this information would require individual business areas to review their records in exceptional detail, which would result in disproportionate costs. I have, however, set out below the range of provision that is in place for disabled adults which has been disaggregated as far as reasonably possible.

My Department funds further education colleges to deliver courses and provide support and assistance to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). Funding is provided to colleges through the recurrent block grant and the Additional Support Fund. The South Eastern Regional College (SERC) does not have a tightly defined geographical area but, broadly, it corresponds with that of the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

In the 2011/12 academic year, SERC delivered provision worth £1,130,500 for students aged between 16 and 25 with learning difficulties and disabilities. This represents 4.6% of the college's total recurrent grant; 0.8% of the FE sector's overall recurrent grant; and 0.7% of the overall FE budget, which funds a number of programmes and initiatives outside of the recurrent grant.

In addition, my Department provides ring-fenced financial support for SLDD, of £3.5m per annum, through its Additional Support Fund (ASF). For SERC, in the 2011/12 academic year, a total of £480, 918 was provided through this fund, being 13.74% of the total ASF budget. As ASF funding is for students of all ages, this figure cannot be disaggregated into age groups; similarly, further education colleges do not differentiate between levels of disability. Therefore, my Department is unable to disaggregate spend into the categories outlined in the question.

My Department's regional strategy for widening participation in higher education, "Access to Success", has identified that students with disabilities and learning difficulties face significant additional difficulties in accessing higher education. The strategy aims to better identify individuals from a disadvantaged background, including students with learning disabilities, and to improve the targeting of available resources to support those with greatest need.

My Department already pays a widening access premium to the universities and university colleges for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. In the 2011/12 academic year, this amounted to £249, 462. The premium is intended to provide specialist equipment and/or specific support for these students and it is allocated based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in each institution in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. The allowance itself attracted £3.013m during 2011/12, which was paid to students of all ages.

My Department guarantees a training place on its "Training for Success" programme for all unemployed young people in the 16 to 17 age groups, with extended eligibility for those with a disability up to age 22. Specialist providers have been engaged to work in conjunction with training suppliers to ensure that specialist support is provided, where needed, to participants in this and the "ApprenticeshipsNI" programme. For the financial year 2011/12, the Department provided £490,809 for this specialist support.

An additional premium of £30 is paid to the training supplier on top of the weekly training fee under the "Training for Success" programme for the duration of training. Similarly, a disability supplement, of up to £1,560, is payable under "ApprenticeshipsNI" to allow training suppliers to provide additional support, such as specialist equipment. These payments are contained within the overall funding offer and it is not possible to isolate the expenditure.

"Access to Work (NI)" is a flexible programme designed to overcome employment related obstacles faced by people with disabilities. In 2011/12, £117k was spent on people with a learning disability through that programme. Similarly, £1,166k was spent through "Workable (NI)", which is a programme that gives people with disabilities the opportunity of working alongside non-disabled employees in a wide variety of jobs.

Finally, in 2011/12, my Department provided 25% contribution funding of up to £2.4m towards 20 European Social Fund projects that specifically target participants with disabilities.

DEL: Funded Learning Unit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the formula by which Funded Learning Units are calculated. **(AQW 19337/11-15)**

Dr Farry: The Funded Learning Unit (FLU) is the method by which my Department allocates recurrent grant to further education colleges and is calculated on the basis of each eligible student enrolment within an academic year. A full-time student enrolment generates one FLU, which has a basic value of £3,400, and a part-time student enrolment will receive a proportion of that amount dependent on the number of hours attended. The value of this basic FLU can, however, vary significantly as a result of the application of several weightings.

The first weighting applied is for qualification level. For those student enrolments undertaking a qualification at Level 2, or above, the basic FLU is multiplied by a qualification-level weighting of 1.1. Provision below Level 2 does not attract any weighting, except in the case of Essential Skills and of English for Speakers of Other Languages, which receive a 1.8 weighting.

Next, an economic-priority weighting is applied which ranges from a multiplier of 1.2 to 1.8 depending on the area of study. This weighting is applied to those courses which are considered to be more expensive to deliver.

Thirdly, a weighting relating to disadvantage is calculated with colleges being ranked based on the Noble indicators of deprivation, which were recently reviewed. All eligible enrolments generate an additional disadvantage FLU with students at Northern Regional and South East Regional colleges receiving an additional 1% of their weighted FLU, students at

South West and Southern Regional colleges receiving an additional 1.1% and students at North West Regional and Belfast Metropolitan colleges receiving an additional 1.2%.

Finally, the total FLU generated for each eligible student enrolment is the sum of the weighted and disadvantage FLU. The college will receive that amount of funding if the student completes his or her course of study. If, however, the student withdraws before January, only one third of the FLU will be payable and if attendance ends before May, only two thirds of the FLU value will be paid.

The total recurrent grant allocations made to each college in the last three years, using the FLU methodology, are as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast Metropolitan College	£34,424,765	£33,230,416	£34,442,000
North West Regional College	£23,297,739	£22,757,139	£23,453,200
Northern Regional College	£22,026,775	£21,240,121	£21,824,600
South Eastern Regional College	£25,323,564	£24,396,470	£23,919,000
South West College	£16,105,037	£16,028,501	£16,231,600
Southern Regional College	£27,022,120	£26,252,441	£26,129,000
Total	**£148,200,000**	**£143,905,088**	**£145,999,400**

DEL: Funded Learning Unit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funds allocated to each of the Further Education Colleges for each Funded Learning Unit.
(AQW 19338/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Funded Learning Unit (FLU) is the method by which my Department allocates recurrent grant to further education colleges and is calculated on the basis of each eligible student enrolment within an academic year. A full-time student enrolment generates one FLU, which has a basic value of £3,400, and a part-time student enrolment will receive a proportion of that amount dependent on the number of hours attended. The value of this basic FLU can, however, vary significantly as a result of the application of several weightings.

The first weighting applied is for qualification level. For those student enrolments undertaking a qualification at Level 2, or above, the basic FLU is multiplied by a qualification-level weighting of 1.1. Provision below Level 2 does not attract any weighting, except in the case of Essential Skills and of English for Speakers of Other Languages, which receive a 1.8 weighting.

Next, an economic-priority weighting is applied which ranges from a multiplier of 1.2 to 1.8 depending on the area of study. This weighting is applied to those courses which are considered to be more expensive to deliver.

Thirdly, a weighting relating to disadvantage is calculated with colleges being ranked based on the Noble indicators of deprivation, which were recently reviewed. All eligible enrolments generate an additional disadvantage FLU with students at Northern Regional and South East Regional colleges receiving an additional 1% of their weighted FLU, students at South West and Southern Regional colleges receiving an additional 1.1% and students at North West Regional and Belfast Metropolitan colleges receiving an additional 1.2%.

Finally, the total FLU generated for each eligible student enrolment is the sum of the weighted and disadvantage FLU. The college will receive that amount of funding if the student completes his or her course of study. If, however, the student withdraws before January, only one third of the FLU will be payable and if attendance ends before May, only two thirds of the FLU value will be paid.

The total recurrent grant allocations made to each college in the last three years, using the FLU methodology, are as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast Metropolitan College	£34,424,765	£33,230,416	£34,442,000
North West Regional College	£23,297,739	£22,757,139	£23,453,200
Northern Regional College	£22,026,775	£21,240,121	£21,824,600
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South West College	£16,105,037	£16,028,501	£16,231,600
Southern Regional College	£27,022,120	£26,252,441	£26,129,000
Total	**£148,200,000**	**£143,905,088**	**£145,999,400**

Further Education Colleges

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the success rate statistics of Further Education Colleges and how these compare with similar institutions in the rest of the UK.
(AQW 19339/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department publishes data in relation to achievement rates in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector. Achievement rates are calculated as the proportion of final year enrolments who have completed their courses and gained full or partial achievement. Success rates however are calculated as the proportion of final year enrolments who started their courses and gained full or partial achievement.

Success Rates by college for the 2011/12 academic year, the latest year for which data are available, are set out in the Table below.

College	Success Rate
Belfast Metropolitan	71%
Northern Regional	71%
South Eastern Regional	75%
Southern Regional	81%
South West	76%
North West Regional	72%
Sector	**74%**

Source: Further Education Leavers Survey

While other parts of the UK also publish Further Education success rates, due to variances in methodology employed these are not directly comparable with Northern Ireland figures. However, my Department is currently initiating a benchmarking exercise to determine the feasibility of adjusting for these differences, and the results of this exercise will be available by the end of 2013.

Further Education Colleges

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to amend the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, to place Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland on a level playing field with their counterparts in England.
(AQW 19340/11-15)

Dr Farry: On the assumption that you are referring to the decision made by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify further education colleges as Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), I can inform you that I intend to launch a public consultation, in the near future, on the future status of further education colleges in Northern Ireland. The consultation will inform a final decision on colleges' future status, which will, in turn, determine the extent to which, if at all, the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 needs to be amended.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Hospitality, Tourism and Retail Sectors

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures will be introduced to support the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors with the difficulties they have faced as a result of the recent civil unrest.
(AQW 18670/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, will provide financial support to help with the promotion of Belfast City Centre through the 'Backin Belfast' marketing campaign.

The aim of this campaign, which is being co-ordinated by Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, in consultation with Belfast City Council, is to encourage people to come into the city, to increase footfall and restore confidence amongst visitors through the use promotional offers from local businesses.

The ni2012 campaign was hugely successful in enhancing the image of Northern Ireland and I want to ensure that a positive message continues to be delivered.

Invest NI: Jobs Promotion

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been (i) created; and (ii) promoted by Invest NI activities between the financial years 2007/08 and 2011/12.
(AQW 18969/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI reports on the number of jobs promoted (expected to be created) since this is the basis upon which the Programme for Government and Invest NI's Corporate Plan targets are set. Table 1 below presents this information for the five years 2007/08 to 2011/12.

Table 1: Invest NI Jobs Promoted (2007-08 to 2011-12)

Year	New Jobs Promoted
2007-08	4,202
2008-09	5,252
2009-10	4,058
2010-11	4,940
2011-12	5,233
Total	**23,684**

Notes:

1 New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

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 8,000 jobs through the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP), delivered in partnership with Enterprise NI. These jobs are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Invest NI Jobs Supported through Enterprise Development Programme (2007-08 to 2011-12)

Year	New Jobs Promoted
2007-08	2,058
2008-09	1,431
2009-10	1,321
2010-11	1,888
2011-12	1,323
Total	**8,021**

Note: These figures are based on an estimate of jobs created by an individual EDP offer. This estimation process is derived from an independent evaluation of the programme.

Invest NI works with businesses to promote new jobs but it is ultimately the responsibility of the company to ensure that those jobs are delivered on the ground. It should be recognised that employment grants will only be paid to a business based on the jobs actually created.

Invest NI is currently reviewing options to enable it report actual job creation in the future. However, it will take some time before this information becomes meaningful for reporting purposes, since assisted projects can take up to five years to realise their maximum level of job creation.

Businesses: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what potential exists through her Department to assist in attracting new businesses to North Down.
(AQW 19017/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In terms of inward investment, Invest NI is responsible for selling Northern Ireland at a regional level. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plays a large part in the economic growth of Northern Ireland and Invest NI has a very successful track record of attracting high quality investment which will benefit the whole of the region.

Invest NI is very aware of the challenges facing local areas in Northern Ireland and acknowledges the importance of working closely with councils and other stakeholders to develop the features and benefits of each local area in order to maximise opportunities for economic growth.

Invest NI has also developed & launched a smartphone application ('FDI app') to help raise Northern Ireland's profile within international markets which can be used as a tool to help promote the benefits of setting up in the region to potential investors. The app will present the regions' key selling messages and relevant data in a format that is current, easily accessible, easy to read and easily updated. Presenting key selling messages in this innovative manner will help Northern Ireland differentiate itself from other competing regions. The app will focus on Northern Ireland as a region, and local councils, including North Down District Council Area have been invited to participate in using this tool to input with a local proposition for their area.

Electricity: Grid

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the existing capacity of the electricity grid, in the context of possible electricity-generating tidal developments off the North Antrim coast; and what long-term planning is in place in this regard.
(AQW 19059/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Grid capacity and development are matters for the independent Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland in conjunction with NIE, the grid owner and SONI, the system operator, not my Department. Provision is made under the Price Control process between the Utility Regulator and NIE to agree long term planning and funding requirements to upgrade the network to support the integration of renewable electricity projects. The Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland is due to consult on the connection policy for offshore renewables shortly.

Electricity: Grid

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grid upgrade would be required to facilitate electricity-generating tidal developments off the North Antrim coast.
(AQW 19060/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to my response to AQW 19059/ 11-15.

City of Culture and One Plan

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the bespoke marketing campaign for the City of Culture and the One Plan for Derry.
(AQW 19087/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is liaising closely with Derry City Council and the Culture Company to develop aligned marketing and communications plans going forward.

Derry City Council is developing a One Marketing Plan for the City of which The UK City of Culture is an important focus and opportunity for 2013.

NITB's Spring marketing campaign promoting short breaks in the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland markets launched on Monday 28 January 2013 and the 30 second TV advert had a strong focus on Londonderry as UK City of Culture 2013. A bespoke Londonderry 10 second edit has aired from Monday 4 February 2013.

Tourism: Mournes

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how her Department is marketing the Mournes as a tourist destination.
(AQW 19111/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 15729/11-15.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote Northern Ireland as a short break destination to both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland markets and they will continue to promote and market The Mournes.

In November 2012, NITB facilitated two marketing workshops in the Mournes area (Newcastle and Newry) for local tourism providers.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in Great Britain and overseas markets and regularly features the Mourne Mountains as part of its extensive global destination marketing programme. Tourism Ireland also works with tourism industry partners from the region to promote the Mournes overseas and this year tourism industry partners from County Down will join Tourism Ireland at major consumer events such as the Philadelphia Flower Show, Canada Blooms and PGA Orlando, Florida.

Venture Capital Funds

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of American-based Venture Capital Funds having a clause in their contracts that bars them from doing business with any start-up company which has operations in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19143/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am not aware of any specific barriers to American based Venture Capital Funds investing in Northern Ireland. It would be for each individual fund to decide on the basis of its legal operation and investment policy. In order to address the specific question, I would have to seek legal advice. However, American based VCs tend not to invest in start-ups in Northern Ireland (or Europe) and that is why Invest NI promotes seed and other development funds, such as the NISPO Funds and Co-Fund NI to deal with the market failure.

There have been a limited number of investments by American based Venture Capital Funds in Northern Ireland companies. These have tended to be larger deals beyond the start-up stage. There are commercial barriers to Northern Ireland companies attracting venture funding below the £2 million deal size from outside the region. The Northern Ireland market is not particularly attractive to external Venture Capital Funds because of the higher risk/reward profile, and the higher transaction and investment management costs associated with managing a small portfolio, perhaps only one investment, remotely.

DETI: G8 Summit, DETI Additional Resources

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what additional resources her Department will receive to cover any additional costs as a result of hosting the G8 Summit and from where these resources will be allocated.
(AQW 19160/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No additional resources have been allocated to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the G8 Summit.

Economy

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 18379/11-15 whether the Coagent appraisal based its findings on the allocation of £40,000 to the Foyle Cup Tournament; and whether the 9,801 bed nights generated was considered as part of this year's Tourist Board allocation.
(AQW 19204/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 18379/11-15.

Air Transport: Route Development

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the prospects for further route development in 2013 at (i) Belfast International Airport; (ii) Belfast City Airport; and (iii) Londonderry airport.
(AQW 19238/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Tourism Ireland, is in dialogue with Northern Ireland's airports on an ongoing basis to help bring new air services to Northern Ireland and to explore opportunities to promote, and drive demand for, existing services. However, while under development, these discussions are of a commercially sensitive and confidential nature.

In terms of future prospects, I am keen to see improved access to all markets which offer the business and inbound tourism links which are important to the Northern Ireland economy. In particular, I believe there is real potential to reinstate direct air services from Northern Ireland to Germany and Canada.

UK City of Culture 2013

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she plans to attend any events connected to the UK City of Culture 2013 in Londonderry.
(AQW 19242/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I attended the Sons & Daughters Concert. I would hope to be invited to as many events as possible associated with the Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013, diary permitting.

Mutual Energy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQO 3298/11-15, for an update on her discussion with Mutual Energy.
(AQW 19386/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I had a useful meeting with Mutual Energy and discussed a range of issues. In relation to the current fault on the Moyle Interconnector, the company continues to work to pinpoint the fault and consider the range of options, associated costs and timescales for bringing it back to full capacity. These options will, in due course, be submitted to the Utility Regulator for consideration and a decision on the way forward. With regard to the cost of repairing the faults which occurred in 2012, Mutual Energy continues to engage with their insurance company on this matter.

Shale Gas Forum

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the dates when the Shale Gas Forum met; and the dates it is due to meet over the next two years.
(AQW 19435/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The inaugural meeting of the Shale Gas Regulators Forum took place on 18 October 2012. Future meetings will take place on a quarterly to six monthly basis but exact dates remain to be determined. The frequency of future meetings may change in response to any major developments which the Forum may need to consider.

Department of the Environment

Groundwater Level

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current depth of the water table in each (i) constituency; and (ii) council area and how much has this varied over the past ten years.
(AQW 19006/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) does not currently hold representative data of the current depth of the water table (groundwater level) for each constituency and council area in Northern Ireland. The location and most recently held data on depth to water table for each NIEA groundwater monitoring site and the corresponding constituency and council areas for each monitoring location is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Groundwater monitoring site location and groundwater level

No.	Constituency	District Council Area	Groundwater Level Monitoring Site	Location		Most recent monthly average depth to water table (metres)	When recorded	Long term average depth to water table (metres)
				Easting	Northing			
1	East Antrim	Larne	Killyglen	336633	403099	24.2	Dec-12	24.4
2	East Londonderry	Limavady	Gortgarn	271056	424220	5.1	Dec-11	5.0
3	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Fermanagh	Derrylin	228212	322053	2.0	Aug-12	2.4
4	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Fermanagh	Silverhill	221736	345572	2.6	Sep-12	3.1
5	Lagan Valley	Lisburn	Dunmurry	329136	369500	3.5	Nov-12	3.6
6	Newry & Armagh	Armagh	Tullyard	287805	347252	2.0	Sep-12	1.9
7	North Antrim	Moyle	Armoy Road	307662	434540	1.4	Aug-12	0.8
8	North Antrim	Ballymoney	Drumbest	302459	424889	0.9	Nov-12	na
9	North Antrim	Ballymena	Buckna	320221	408151	3.8	Aug-12	na
10	South Belfast	Belfast	Lady Dixon Park	330396	367472	6.6	Nov-12	na
11	South Belfast	Belfast	Mary Peter's Track	331719	368570	4.2	Nov-12	4.4
12	South Belfast	Belfast	Newforge	332602	369628	2.4	Nov-12	na
13	South Belfast	Belfast	Orchardville	330176	370504	0.8	Nov-12	1.0
14	West Tyrone	Strabane	Newtownstewart	241213	386430	2.7	Feb-12	na

It should be noted that the depth to water table will vary throughout the year with generally higher water table levels being observed throughout the winter months. The depths to water table observed at the NIEA monitoring sites are indicative of the relative water level within the groundwater body (aquifer) in which they are located. Depth to water table in the surrounding area may vary greatly with depths generally increasing with altitude. Therefore the depth to water table is specific for the point of monitoring only.

At the majority of the NIEA monitoring sites, records are intermittent and an annual average depth cannot be calculated. The most representative long term continuous records of water table depth are for the monitoring sites Killyglen (1) and Dunmurry (5).

Records for the last 10 years indicate that the annual average groundwater levels for each year do not vary by more than 2.7% for Killyglen and 7.1% for Dunmurry from the long term annual average levels. There is also no evidence of a rising or falling trend in depth to water table at either site.

More detailed information including the underlying data records for groundwater level monitoring is available on request from waterinfo@doeni.gov.uk

Noise Pollution

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans has his Department has to deal with noise pollution.
(AQW 19091/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department of the Environment has responsibility for legislation and policy on noise control; however, noise complaints and the enforcement of noise control legislation is a matter for the environmental health department within each district council.

Noise is an issue which I take very seriously as there is no doubt that nuisance noise can badly affect people's health and well being. The recently published 'Noise Complaint Statistics for Northern Ireland 2011/2012' shows that there were over 12,000 complaints made to district councils across Northern Ireland. As with previous years, domestic noise is the major culprit and this is something that can, in the main, be avoided, especially those complaints relating to loud music/televisions and parties. One of the reasons that I was keen to have the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 enacted was to give district councils greater powers to deal with noise from domestic premises at night. I have been strongly urging all district councils to make full use of all the powers available to them to deal with persistent offenders and I will be monitoring the noise complaints statistics to assess the impact of the new legislation.

In addition my Department is also progressing work to tackle noise through the requirements of the EU Environmental Noise Directive. The aim of the Directive is to avoid, prevent or reduce on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise. It focuses on the impact of such noise on individuals, complementing existing EU legislation, which sets standards for noise emissions from specific transport and industrial sources.

During 2012, and in line with the requirements of the Directive, my Department completed work on determining the noise exposure of the population through the second round noise mapping exercise. The next stage of this work, to be undertaken during 2013, is to establish Action Plans based on the mapping results. Once I have approved or adopted these Action Plans they will be submitted to the EU Commission. The noise maps are currently available for the public to view on the Department's noise web site at: www.noiseni.co.uk, while the noise Action Plans will be added once adopted.

Further support and guidance on noise policy and legislation is available online through a range of information and advice at: www.doeni.gov.uk and www.noiseni.co.uk. The Department also publishes the annual noise complaints statistics report on both websites. In addition to providing statistics the report also provides details of councils' new and innovative ways of tackling noise nuisance.

DOE: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19250/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Special Adviser has made no declarations of interest since his appointment. In line with NICS arrangements declarations of interests in this Department are centrally recorded on HRConnect. Such declarations by staff are personal data as defined under the Data Protection Act 1998. Any requests to view this central record would be considered on a case by case basis under the provisions of that Act, including seeking the consent to disclosure of the data subject concerned.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Northern Ireland Civil Service: Alleged Disciplinary Offences

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of Civil Service personnel currently suspended from work for alleged disciplinary offences; (ii) the length of time they have been suspended; and (iii) the cost to date in salaries, National Insurance and pension contributions.
(AQW 18736/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is provided in the table below. In order to protect the identity of individuals, the information is presented on a NICS-wide basis.

Number of personnel	Length of time suspended	Total salary	Total National Insurance Contributions	Total Pension contributions
19	10 years, 2 weeks	£140,463.16	£12,459.36	£26,705.84

North/South Pension Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail how the core North/South Pension Scheme differs from the Northern Ireland Civil Service pension scheme; and who is eligible to join the scheme.
(AQW 19001/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The core provisions for northern members of the North/South Pension Scheme were originally modelled on the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme in Northern Ireland. The Civil Service Pension Scheme introduced Nuvos – a career average pension scheme for all new entrants from July 2007. The North/South Scheme has continued to offer a final pension scheme to all eligible members.

In addition, the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme in Northern Ireland introduced increased contributions for employees from April 2012 and these will be increasing again in April 2013. It is intended that they will increase further in April 2014. Details of this are available on website www.dfpni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni.

The Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme in Northern Ireland also changed from April 2011 to increase pensions in payment annually in line with the Consumer Prices Index instead of the Retail Prices Index. It is intended that the North/South Pension Scheme will be aligned with this change from April 2013 and work is underway to align the other provisions of the North/South Scheme with the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

In terms of eligibility, the Bodies currently participating in the North/South scheme are as follows:

- Waterways Ireland;
- The Food Safety Promotion Board;
- The Trade and Business Development Body;
- The Special EU Programmes Body ;
- The North/South Language Body; and
- Tourism Ireland Limited.

Professional Legal Studies Course

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people, who passed the examination for the Professional Legal Studies course, have been unable to take up their places as a result of being unable to find a solicitor master, for each of the last three years.
(AQW 19057/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel understands that there is not a “pass mark” for the examination for Admission to the Professional Legal Studies course, and that there is, alternatively, a list of merit. The Department does not hold statistics on how many people on the list of merit have been unable to take up their places as a result of being unable to find a solicitor master.

This information may be obtained from the Law Society for Northern Ireland.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to improve the methodology employed within the Net Fiscal Balance report.
(AQW 19075/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not have any specific plans at this time to revise the methodology used to produce the Net Fiscal Balance Report. This report and the estimates contained therein have been produced by applying the methodology originally designed to produce the “Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland” (GERS) publication.

It must be recognised that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of Northern Ireland’s public sector finances and in particular to produce an estimate of our overall net fiscal balance position or fiscal deficit. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items - many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors.

That said, where beneficial, practical and appropriate to do so, DFP will consider how the methodology might be developed in the future. For example, where new or improved data becomes available or in light of any methodological updates to the GERS report with which we attempt to maintain consistency.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the use of estimates within the Net Fiscal Balance report published in November 2012.
(AQW 19076/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department does not have any specific plans at this time to revise the methodology used to produce the Net Fiscal Balance Report. This report and the estimates contained therein have been produced by applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication.

It must be recognised that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of Northern Ireland's public sector finances and in particular to produce an estimate of our overall net fiscal balance position or fiscal deficit. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items - many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors.

That said, where beneficial, practical and appropriate to do so, DFP will consider how the methodology might be developed in the future. For example, where new or improved data becomes available or in light of any methodological updates to the GERS report with which we attempt to maintain consistency.

Northern Ireland Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to identify the funding gap between the Departmental Expenditure Limit allocated and the estimated revenue generated in each financial year from 20060-7 through to 2010-11.
(AQW 19079/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The NI DEL allocated in each financial year from 2006-07 to 2010-11 is as follows:

					£million
	2006-07	**2007-08**	**2008-09**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**
NI DEL	8,175.7	8,892.3	9,253.9	10,234.4	11,330.0

Source: Final Budget Plan position for each of the years requested as reported at that time.

The estimated revenue from NI in each financial year from 2006-07 to 2010-11 is as follows:

					£million
	2006-07	**2007-08**	**2008-09**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**
Estimated Revenue	12,356	13,191	12,679	11,887	12,703

Source: NI Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

There is no direct relationship between the Northern Ireland (NI) Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) and tax revenue generated locally. Furthermore, the NI DEL does not represent the totality of public expenditure in the region and therefore it is not appropriate to consider a 'funding gap' in this regard.

Non-tax Revenue

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the non-tax revenue which is generated by each Department.
(AQW 19085/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I assume that the question refers to receipts scoring within the Northern Ireland departmental DEL budgets since these translate into additional spending power for the Executive. I also assume that the Member is interested in the latest available full year Final Outturn figures. In the 2011-12 financial year, these receipts amounted to £1,010 million of resource income and £165 million of capital income.

The resource income is generated from a wide variety of revenue streams arising from the services provided by departments, whilst the capital income stems mainly from the sale of surplus assets and repayment of loans to public corporations. Income from the EU is also included in both the resource and capital income numbers.

Excluded from these figures are the income from Regional Rates (which scores as a tax receipt) and the RRI £200 million loan facility.

A breakdown by department is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Departmental Non-tax Receipts 2011-2012

		£millions
Department	**Resource**	**Capital**
AOCC	-	0.0
DARD	-334.4	-15.9
DCAL	-10.8	-0.2
DE	-10.3	-1.9
DEL	-37.5	-0.8
DETI	-28.9	-26.9
DFP	-96.2	-1.5
DHSSPS	-157.0	0.0
DOE	-18.7	-1.4
DOJ	-63.3	-2.4
DRD	-113.2	-5.9
DSD	-111.2	-107.9
FSA	-3.6	0.0
NIA	0.0	-
NIAO	-2.5	-
NIAUR	-6.5	-
OFMDFM	-15.3	-
PPS	-0.8	-
Total	**-1,010.3**	**-164.8**

Rates: Non-payment

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many court cases were initiated against people for the non-payment of rates during each of the last three financial years; (ii) how many of these cases reached court; (iii) how many people were found guilty of non-payment; and (iv) of the people found guilty, how many were declared bankrupt as a result. **(AQW 19114/11-15)**

Mr Wilson: There are a number of steps involved in the process of recovering debt from ratepayers. When a ratepayer fails to pay their bill LPS issues a ‘final notice’ asking for the outstanding rates to be paid or contact to be made immediately in an attempt to enter into a mutually agreeable payment arrangement. In 2011/12 a total of 136,937 ‘final notices’ were issued.

If payment is not received and the ratepayer fails to contact LPS, then the case will be listed for Court action and a Court process issued. There were 45,902 Court processes issued in 2011/12. In many cases (around half) the receipt of a Court process is sufficient to prompt the ratepayer to contact LPS and pay in full or enter into a payment arrangement.

If the case goes to court and is found in favour of LPS, a decree is awarded. This enables LPS to pursue payment through the Enforcement of Judgements Office (EJO) or, to a lesser extent, through the bankruptcy route. 19,634 decrees were awarded in 2011/12.

Of the 1,569 bankruptcy orders made in 2011-12, LPS was the petitioner in 189 cases and individual debtors were the petitioners in 847 cases. In the same period there were 219 company compulsory liquidations, with LPS being the petitioner in 17 cases and HMRC was the petitioner in 104 cases.

Pursuing debt through the EJO requires the issuing of a Notice of Intention (NOI) to enforce the judgement. LPS will issue a letter to the ratepayer advising them that enforcement will proceed unless payment is received or an acceptable payment arrangement is made. If no payment or arrangement is made within seven days, then the NOI is forwarded to EJO who will issue it to the ratepayer on behalf of LPS. In 2011-12 15,370 NOIs were issued. During this process LPS has to confirm that the ratepayer still lives at the address given. When confirmed, the debt is passed to EJO to recover.

The table attached provides the relevant figures for the last three years. It should be noted that the recovery process can span more than one financial year so the numbers quoted within any given year are not directly related. For example, the 19,634 decrees awarded in 2011/12 are not all as a direct consequence of the 45,902 Court processes issued in that year.

Debt Recovery Stage	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
'Final Notice' issued	123,853	122,251	136,937
Court processes issued	49,422	42,912	45,902
Decrees awarded	16,454	18,155	19,634
Notices of Intention issued	14,871	14,788	15,370
All bankruptcies	**1,250**	**1,456**	**1,569**
Bankruptcies where LPS is the petitioner	46	78	189
All company compulsory liquidations	**179**	**262**	**219**
Company compulsory liquidations where LPS is the petitioner	6	17	17

G8 Summit: Costs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assurances he has received from the British Treasury on covering the costs of the G8 summit which will take place in Fermanagh in June.
(AQW 19144/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The costs of hosting the G8 event have not yet been fully quantified. An Executive Steering Group has been established to coordinate all activities involved in hosting this event, including the identification of all associated costs involved.

My officials are also liaising with the NI Office and HM Treasury on the funding arrangements and it is clear that there is likely to be substantial contributions made by the UK Government to the hosting of this event.

Peace III

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to publish the (i) names of each group benefiting from Peace III funding under Theme1:2; and (ii) allocation of funding to each group.
(AQW 19200/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details funding awarded under PEACE III Theme 1.2, Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past, as of 31 January 2013. An exchange rate of £1=€1.25 has been used where required.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Total Award £
An Teach Bán: Centre for Peace Building	Remember and Change	423,459.36
Ashton Community Trust	Exploring the Past Together for a Better Future	402,707.60
Ashton Community Trust	Bridge Of Hope	392,903.90
Belfast Interface Project	Enabling Our Future	379,362.00
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre	Citizenship and Fellowship Education [CAFE]	371,556.63
Best Cellars Music Collective	Peace Radio	154,753.13
Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre (BURC)	DISC II	746,756.00
C.A.L.M.S	Gateways to Health	255,598.33
Calipo Theatre Co	Sharp Focus - Crossing the Divide	496,208.80
Cavan Family Resource Centre	Buandóchas (B) (Eternal Hope) Counselling	229,841.52
Communities Connect - Dundalk institute of Technology	Deepening the peace, Widening the web - working title	452,670.30
Community Dialogue	Securing Our Future: 3 Steps to Dialogue	297,757.26
Community Workers Co-operative - Donegal Network	Collective Action for Positive Peace (CAPP) Project	389,068.00
Community Workers Co-operative - Donegal Network	Harnessing Equality for Lasting Peace (HELP) Project	468,469.77
Conflict trauma Resource centre	Beyond Conflict	406,641.92
Corpus Christi Services	Healing The Troubled Past	185,584.56

Lead Partner	Project Name	Total Award £
Creggan Neighbourhood Partnership	Giving Opportunities to Address Legacies (GOAL)	347,471.39
Crossfire Trust	Restoring Hope	277,462.05
Cunamh (Help)	Peace In Mind/Suaimhneas Intinne	278,132.60
Curriculum Development Unit	Education for Reconciliation	454,870.00
Diversity Challenges Ltd	The Green and Blue Across the Thin Line	216,400.00
Diversity Challenges Ltd	'The Way We Were' - Uncovering our shared past.	95,565.00
Expac Ltd	Future Resolutions	302,820.00
Expac Ltd	Conflicts of Interest	407,495.46
Falls Community Council	Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium	826,749.15
Falls Community Council	Pieces of the Past	293,280.48
Falls Community Council	Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium	806,651.02
Falls Women's Centre	Training & Employment Project	155,661.57
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	Support and Active Carer Respite for Excluded Dependents (SACRED)	155,931.04*
Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	Conflict Archive Project And Border Lands Experience (CAPABLE)	187,578.01*
Forthspring Inter Community Group	Five Decades	128,191.50
Forward Learning	Knowing Me Knowing You - An historical and cultural adventure!	151,789.19*
Gaslight Media Trust	'The Arc: Acknowledging the Past, Negotiating the Present & Facing the Future'	386,725.00
Gaslight Media Trust	Epilogues Facilitating Understanding of the Other	231,979.53
Healing Through Remembering	Voyager	526,120.00
Healing Through Remembering	Whatever You Say Say Something	817,097.83
Holy Trinity Centre	Out Of Hours Community Counselling Service	169,728.06
INCORE	Journeys Out	474,098.16
Inishowen Development Partnership	Engage Youth	470,717.60
Inishowen Development Partnership	YOUTH 52 - Securing the Future	510,338.63
Institute for Counselling & Personal Development	RENEW-Community Challenge and change for peace & reconciliation	248,655.74
Ionad Forbartha Gnó Teo. t/a WESTBIC (Business Development Centre Ltd)	Glórtha Aduaidh (Northern Voices)	522,810.40
Irish Football Association	Football For All Project	516,765.90
Irish Football Association	Football For All - 2012-2015 - Looking Back to Move Forward	541,763.06
Junior Achievement Ireland	Our World	476,303.20
Justice for Innocent Victims of Terrorism	Pathways to Justice	369,430.00
Latton Social Services and Development Ltd	Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation	390,950.40
Monaghan Education Centre	Embracing Shared Communities	328,267.20
New Life Counselling	Victims and Survivors Counselling Project	208,953.90
North West Play Resource Centre	Theatre of Witness	455,602.00

Lead Partner	Project Name	Total Award £
North West Play Resource Centre (T/A The Playhouse)	Theatre of Witness	325,661.86
Northern Ireland Phoenix Organisation (NIPO)	Northern Ireland Phoenix Project	996,867.00
Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC)	“Media Initiative for Rural Children Cross Borders” (Respecting Difference Programme)	420,978.00
Northern Ireland Trade Union Education and Social Centre	DISC- Development for Inclusion and Sustainable Communities	336,624.00
Pat Finucane Centre	Legacy Project	375,680.55
Peace and Reconciliation group	Dealing with Past, Shaping the Future (D.P.S.F.)	182,195.79
R.A.F.T. - Restorative Action Following the Troubles	Transcending Trauma	448,068.40
Relatives for Justice	Transitional Legacies	242,548.00
Relatives for Justice	Participative Transitional Support	544,793.87
SAVER/NAVER	Practical steps towards reconciliation	208,034.53*
Seán McConville	The Irish Peace Process: Layers of Recollection and Meaning	862,297.00
Seaview Enterprises Ltd	‘Mes Que Un Club’ (More than a Club)	422,600.00
Smashing Times Theatre Company	The Memory Project	418,347.20
South Armagh Rural Women’s Network	Behind the Masks	317,593.14
South East Fermanagh Foundation	The Phoenix Project	1,092,001.56
Survivors of Trauma	A Future Together	272,702.55
TARA CENTRE	Reconciliation: Individuals and Communites Acknowledging and Dealing with the Past	435,884.71
Taughmonagh Community Forum Ltd	Shared Futures	321,447.22
Taughmonagh Community Forum Ltd	Legacy	241,277.00
Teach Oscail (Open House)	Tullacmongan/Cavanaleck Cross Border Youth Project	312,922.86
The Bytes Project	Foundation for Reconciliation	97,212.33
The Corrymeela Community	Corrymeela Facing the Future with NICRAS	191,920.62
The Ely Centre	Project Elohim	285,145.59
The Pat Finucane Centre Ltd	Recovery of Living Memory Archive	643,542.00
The Peace Factory	P.A.Z. Peace Action Zone	314,009.18
Towards Understanding and Healing	Developing and Sustaining Storytelling and Dialogue Processes	346,536.00
Towards Understanding and Healing	Healing through Storytelling and Dialogue	228,726.27
Trademark	Consolidating the peace	257,269.37
Trauma Recovery Network	Connecting Head and Heart	223,075.48
Tyrone Donegal Partnership	Border Lives	420,128.00
Ulster Peoples College	The Peoples History Initiative	213,808.42
Verbal Arts Centre	Crows on the Wire	378,604.00
Victims and Survivors Trust	3 Tiers Project - Creating pathways for inclusion through active participation	203,924.96
WAVE Trauma Centre	Journeys Out	668,868.43
WAVE Trauma Centre	Back to the Future - Building Peace Programme	229,577.74

Lead Partner	Project Name	Total Award £
WAVE Trauma Centre	Breaking the Cycle of the Troubles Legacy for our future Generations	312,010.00
WAVE Trauma Centre	Learning from the Past to educate our Future	534,757.00
Youth Action Northern Ireland	Reconciling communities - champions for change	414,638.00
Youth Initiatives	Crosslinks Culture Connections (CLCC or Crosslinks)	330,751.19
Youth Initiatives	Crosslinks Legacy Project	380,260.00
Youth Link: NI	Building Positive Sustainable and Integrated Communities	417,484.00
Youth Link: NI	Community Capacity Building Strategies	419,348.85
YouthAction NI	Peace Dividend For Young People	494,548.60

Note to table:

* – Letter of Offer

Peace III

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current estimate of expenditure on administration in respect of Peace III.
(AQW 19201/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The PEACE III Programme has a Technical Assistance budget of £15,978,805.60. Expenditure was £9,542,036 as of 31 December 2012, and the current forecast is for expenditure of £13,452,957.60 by the end of the programme.

Ulster Savings Certificates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much of the £6m held in the form of Ulster Savings Certificates, issued between 1922 and 1991, has been reclaimed following his public announcement three years ago.
(AQW 19269/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at 4 February 2013, the amount reclaimed by holders of Ulster Savings Certificates since 1 January 2010 is £568k.

Ulster Savings Certificates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the information held on file of the original purchasers of Ulster Savings Certificates including (i) name and address; (ii) birth details and (iii) date of purchase.
(AQW 19270/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My department holds an electronic and paper register of around 28,000 original purchasers of Ulster Savings Certificates which remained unclaimed as at 31 March 2005.

The register includes information such as holder names and address details; certificate numbers and purchase dates; the number of certificates purchased and the original value; and the amount of principal and interest due on unclaimed certificates. In some instances, birth dates are also held.

The register is used to ensure all claims made to redeem certificates are valid.

Land and Property Services: Mapping System

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what changes or alterations have been made to the mapping system used by Land and Property Service in the last five years; (ii) how many mapping errors and inaccuracies have been found in maps issued in each of the last five years; (iii) what investigations are taking place into other errors found in the mapping system; and (iv) with whom responsibility lies, including financial responsibility, for the correction of errors in individual folios which result from errors in the mapping system.
(AQW 19285/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Land & Property Services (LPS) Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI) mapping database is continually revised to take account of new information relating to roads, housing, and commercial property developments etc. Over the past twelve months a programme of positional improvement (PI) of the OSNI mapping database has been implemented, whereby the database is being updated to accuracy levels made possible by ever more sophisticated methodologies, and global positioning satellite technologies. The PI programme is due to complete in mid-summer 2013. This

means that the representation on a map of real world features will be more accurately positioned. LPS Land Registry Mapping is required by Section 62 of the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970 (the Act) to be based upon the OSNI map. Land Registry mapping, however tends only to be updated when an application for registration is received, on the sale or mortgage of a property. A consequence of this is that registration boundaries previously coincident with OSNI mapping will on occasions appear as offset from the positionally improved OSNI mapping. In these instances where the inconsistencies are brought to the attention of the Land Registry, the Registry map will be updated in accordance with the provisions of Rule 149 (1A) of the Land Registration (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the Rules).

It is not possible to say how many errors or perceived inaccuracies there have been in the last five years. Mapping queries are dealt with as line of business as they arise – both by staff in LPS Mapping and Valuation and in the Registration Directorates.

Legislation governing the operation of the Land Registry is specific in terms of the accuracy limitations of the information recorded on the Registry Map. It is for location purposes only (Rule 141), and therefore folio boundaries are not guaranteed. (Section 64 of the Act).

The coincidence of Land Registry boundaries and OSNI features may have been affected by revisions of the OSNI map subsequent to registration. Warning texts appear on all copy map products to make customers aware of this possibility. They are also displayed at the commencement of an electronic map searching session.

Perceived mapping errors and anomalies are fully investigated as they are identified on a case-by-case basis. Where errors in the Land Registry Map are identified, they are rectified in accordance with the provisions of Section 69 of the Act which provides for errors to be rectified by consent of all of the interested parties. In the absence of such consent, a Court Order is required.

When mapping errors are identified and fully investigated by Land Registry staff, they will be rectified within the legislative constraints outlined in (iii) above. If an error results in a loss, a claim for compensation can be submitted to LPS in accordance with the provisions of Section 71, and Schedule 9 of the Act. Compensation payments are made by DFP from the consolidated fund.

DFP: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19291/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Minister's Special Adviser has completed a 'Declaration of Interests' form and has advised of any declarations of interest.

Completed 'Declaration of Interests' forms are held by the Departmental Establishment Officer.

The DFP Website currently advises that a Register of Interests is maintained by DFP.

Rates: Relief for Sporting Clubs

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will consider enabling local sports clubs to avail of a discretionary 100 percent rates relief to help communities in these difficult economic times.
(AQW 19325/11-15)

Mr Wilson: You may recall that the issue of a review of rates relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs was the subject of a No Named Day motion in November 2011. During this debate I indicated that I would be happy to re examine the level of relief afforded to amateur sports clubs but that this should follow a more extensive review of the needs of that sector, including the full range of options for providing support. My position on this matter has not changed.

There must be a full and proper assessment of need- does every local sports club need help and if so how best can that support be offered? This is assessment should include the issue of exclusive clubs verses more open clubs, treatment of clubs with bar and restaurant facilities and last but not least consideration of alternative ways of providing support outside the rating system.

You will appreciate that my Department is not in the best position to consider these matters, as they fall within the policy competence of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

DCAL have advised recently that they are currently engaging with the sports and recreation sector (via the NI Sports Forum) to seek views on the matter. Clearly the sector will be arguing to pay no rates but I expect DCAL to present their own evidence around the adequacy of support and what the priorities are; whether that be addressing poverty and social exclusion through sport or something broader. Whatever that is, DCAL will be looking also at alternative ways of providing support.

Should it emerge that rate relief is DCAL's preferred option, that will need to be looked and I am sure some form of discretionary relief could be considered as part of that process. Quite how this would operate and who should exercise that discretion are important considerations. Local Authorities can exercise discretion in the rest of the UK but the context is different there. They do not have two rates as we do (regional and district), nor do they have sports that are associated with one section of the community; which could easily lead to inconsistency of decision making in a NI context if these matters

are decided at Council level. Furthermore, many private members' clubs in the rest of the UK pay full rates for their sporting facilities which are not the case here.

Officials within my Department have already written to their counterparts in DCAL and are prepared to offer advice before any case is put forward for consideration, bearing in mind that every pound in rate relief is a pound less to pay for hospitals, schools, roads, houses and council services. So, value for money has to be assured.

Rates: Exemption for Charities

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of total retail outlets in (i) 2007; and (ii) 2012 were functioning charitable or other similar status which precluded the payment of rates.
(AQW 19346/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at the end of March 2010 (the earliest year for which comparable information is available) the percentage of occupied retail outlets that were occupied and were getting a rating exemption as a result of being a charity was 4.1%. As at the end of March 2012 the equivalent figure was 4.6%.

Fraud Awareness

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel who is the appointed training provider for fraud awareness workshops through the Centre for Applied Learning.
(AQW 19403/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Fraud Awareness Training is delivered by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), through the "Governance and Risk Management Category" of the CAL External Framework Contract.

Special Advisers: Freedom of Information Request to DFP

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how long it took his Department to respond to a Freedom of Information request from the Sunday Life in August 2011 on the uplift of the Special Adviser upper salary band to £90,000 pa; and why it took this length of time.
(AQW 19412/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It took the Department six months to respond to a Freedom of Information request relating to Special Adviser pay received in August 2011. The delay in issuing the final response was due to revised handling procedures adopted by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Special Advisers: Freedom of Information Request to DFP

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the Information Commissioner's ruling, whether he will now release the information sought, since August 2011 by Sunday Life under the Freedom of Information Act, on the uplift of the Special Adviser upper salary band to £90,000 pa.
(AQW 19413/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am currently considering the options available to the Department in light of the Information Commissioner's decision.

Senior Civil Servants: Private Healthcare

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether private healthcare is considered an option for senior staff and directors as part of their Civil Service contracts.
(AQW 19421/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Senior civil servants no longer have specific contracts of employment. Their terms and conditions are set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook. The HR Handbook does not include a provision for private healthcare for any civil servant, including members of the senior civil service nor or are there any current plans for such a provision.

Barristers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of practising barristers in Northern Ireland, in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 19490/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold statistics on the numbers of practising barristers in Northern Ireland in any given year.

The Bar Council, as the regulatory body for barristers, may hold such information.

Solicitors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of practising solicitors in Northern Ireland, in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 19491/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold statistics on the numbers of practising solicitors in Northern Ireland in any given year.

The Law Society for Northern Ireland, as the regulatory body for solicitors, may hold such information.

Ulster Bond

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the information relating to original Ulster Bond owners is held in year order or in spans of years according to purchase date.
(AQW 19586/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department holds a list of Matured Ulster Development Bonds outstanding for repayment as at 31 March 2003.

The information is held in order of redemption date.

Dormant Bank Accounts Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the operation of the Dormant Bank Accounts Scheme.
(AQW 19614/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On 12 September 2012, my officials provided evidence to the DFP Committee detailing my proposals for the NI Dormant Accounts Scheme and outlining the spending priorities that I have identified. These being:

- **Children and young people groups** - This would target those under the age of 18.
- **Faith-based groups** - This would target faith based groups whose religious denominations have recognised moral or ethical objections to applying for funding derived from gambling and as a result of that the applicant group has not previously accepted or applied for lottery funding. A further restriction is placed on any loan that it should be applied solely for charitable purposes according to the law of Northern Ireland.

Following this discussion my Department has undertaken further consultation regarding the proposed appointment of an Investment Trust who will use the Dormant Accounts funds to create a self sustaining loans fund. This consultation has now closed and I will be shortly writing to the DFP Committee detailing the outcomes of this consultation.

Further to this, in November I wrote to the First and deputy First Minister detailing my proposals for the NI Dormant Accounts Scheme, and provided them with a draft Executive paper. Following their endorsement I intend to bring this paper to the Executive seeking agreement.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Department of Education has submitted the full Business Case for the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 19616/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To date, the Department of Education has not submitted the Full Business Case to my Department.

DFP: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19628/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Hospitality expenditure by the Department of Finance and Personnel (including its executive agencies) for 2011/12 was £64k.

Peace III

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether there is an underspend in the current Peace III funding; (ii) how much is the underspend; and (iii) to where the money has been reallocated.
(AQW 19772/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The PEACE III Programme will be fully committed when final decisions are taken on the applications currently being processed. It is not anticipated that there will be an underspend.

In order to ensure that the programme remains fully committed until the end of the programming period, taking into account factors such as slippage and exchange rate variations, it may be necessary to reallocate funding between the programme's themes. To date no such reallocations have taken place.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in establishing the number of abortions that have been facilitated or carried out at the Marie Stopes Clinic in Belfast; and how his Department will bring such regulation to the clinic.
(AQW 18937/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It is not possible to collect information on terminations carried out at Marie Stopes within the current legislative and regulatory framework. However officials are exploring options to ensure that statistics on all terminations in Northern Ireland are collected. One possibility is requiring independent organisations to provide the required information through the successful development, consultation and publication of a standard on terminations which could then be enforced by RQIA. Legislative options are also being considered.

Marie Stopes has stated their intention to comply with the law on termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland.

Maghaberry Prison: Nursing Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the total number of nursing staff attached to the healthcare facility at HMP Maghaberry broken down by those in (a) full time Northern Ireland Prison Service employment; and (b) bank or agency staff; and (ii) the total cost to employ each group per year since 2007.
(AQW 18974/11-15)

Mr Poots: Responsibility for the provision of prison healthcare services transferred to the HSC on 1st April 2008. Since then, services have been commissioned by the HSC Board and delivered by the South Eastern HSC Trust. However healthcare staff remained employees of the NI Prison Service until 1 April 2012 when they transferred to the South Eastern HSC Trust. The information to answer this question is set out in the tables below. The Department of Justice has indicated that information in relation to 2007-08 is not readily available in the form requested and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
NI Prison Service	Expenditure £k	1,770	2,001	2,191	2,157
	Nursing Staff Numbers	45	51	48	48
SE Trust	Expenditure £k	0	11	26	53
	Nursing Staff Numbers	0	3	2	1
Bank & Agency	Expenditure £k	101	159	287	557
	Nursing Staff Numbers[1]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	**Expenditure £k**	**1,871**	**2,171**	**2,504**	**2,767**
	Nursing Staff Numbers[1]	**45**	**54**	**50**	**49**

1 The use of bank/agency varies considerably from day to day. New primary care and mental health structures have been established and the recruitment drive is underway. However, security requirements can lead to delays in newly recruited staff taking up post. Bank/agency will therefore continue to be used in order to deliver services until such times as the whole structure is in place.

DHSSPS: Multi-agency Support Teams

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the money allocated from each Health and Social Care Trust to each of the five Multi Agency support teams in each year since 2007.
(AQW 18986/11-15)

Mr Poots: A breakdown of the money allocated from each Health and Social Care Trust to each of the five Multi Agency support teams in each year since 2007 to 31 March 2013 is set out in the table below:

	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (Children's Inter Disciplinary Schools Team-CIST)	£880,000	£879,000	£853,000	£847,000	£804,000	£798,000
Northern Health & Social Care Trust (Multi-Agency Support Team for Schools -MASTS)	£994,938	£994,938	£985,364	£985,364	£1,002,944	£943,848
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (Additional Support for Children in Education -ASCET)	£803,029	£771,703	£641,331	£637,384	£867,377	£771,688
Southern Health & Social Care Trust (Action for Children in Education - ACE)	£944,915	£762,563	£565,525	£807,652	£801,588	£746,000
Western Health & Social Care Trust (Western Education Support Team - WEST)	£664,452	£661,554	£685,566	£682,998	£688,125	£687,000
Total	**£4,287,334**	**£4,069,758**	**£3,730,786**	**£3,960,398**	**£4,164,034**	**£3,946,536**

Human Trafficking

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many places of refuge are available for victims of human trafficking.
(AQW 19151/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my view, the designation of places of refuge for victims of human trafficking could be highly risky for the victims and refuge providers given the insidious nature of the crime. As a result, there are no designated places of refuge for victims of human trafficking within the health and social care stock. However, where a place of refuge is required this will be provided. Provision differs depending on the age of the victim.

Child victims of human trafficking, who become looked after by a Health and Social Care Trust, will be accommodated in a place deemed to serve the child's best interests. This includes accommodation in children's residential care, foster care or supported accommodation/lodgings.

Adult victims of human trafficking will also be provided with a package of care which meets their assessed needs. Where they require to be accommodated, accommodation will be sought from a range of provision, including residential care, supported accommodation/lodgings or private accommodation. This is in addition to the accommodation provided to victims of trafficking during the 45-day period of recovery and reflection, which is the responsibility of the Minister of Justice.

Human Trafficking

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what help or support is provided for victims of human trafficking to help them to rebuild their lives.
(AQW 19153/11-15)

Mr Poots: All children and young people who are suspected of having been trafficked should be considered to be children in need of care and protection under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. As a result, the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust in whose area a trafficked child is recovered, will be responsible for the provision of accommodation, protection, care and support to the child to best meet his/her assessed needs.

In the case of adults who are suspected of having been trafficked, the Department of Justice currently has a contract with Migrant Help, together with their delivery partner Women's Aid Federation (NI), to provide accommodation and a range of support services for potential victims during the initial 45 day period of recovery and reflection.

Where adult victims are able to exercise Treaty rights or have been given discretionary leave to remain or other immigration status, they will normally be able to apply for relevant social security benefits and housing assistance and will be entitled to access health and social care. However, assessment under the care management process, which is needs-driven, will determine what, if any, health and social care services will be provided. This could include mental health or sexual health services as well as rehabilitative services to help victims integrate within the community in the longer term.

Human Trafficking

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training is provided by his Department to enable social workers to deal effectively with victims of human trafficking.
(AQW 19154/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department funds undergraduate training for those who wish to become social workers. The curriculum covers generic training on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse, including sexual exploitation, as well as methods of intervention with individuals at risk, in crisis or who have experienced trauma. In addition, the undergraduate curriculum addresses specific issues such as refugee and asylum-seeking children and adults, commercial sexual exploitation, domestic and sexual violence and human rights.

My Department also funds a range of awareness and specialist training at post-qualifying level for social workers employed by the HSC dependent on job roles. Those undertaking specific roles in respect of Human Trafficking, such as joint investigations with the police into allegations of abuse, receive specialist training.

Given the respective roles of the PSNI and Social Services for the welfare and protection of child and adult victims of Human Trafficking, there is ongoing collaboration and co-operation between the PSNI, the HSC Board and Trusts in planning and delivering joint training initiatives which are supported by my Department and the Department of Justice.

Meningitis B Vaccine

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to introduce the new meningitis b vaccine into the Childhood Immunisation Schedule.
(AQW 19220/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vaccination policy in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is guided by the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers on matters relating to the provision of vaccination and immunisation services. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered.

The JCVI has begun an evaluation of the impact and cost-effectiveness of possible meningitis B vaccination strategies. This evaluation requires a complex analysis and final JCVI advice is not expected until later in the year. I will consider the JCVI recommendation when I have received it.

Allotments

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Public Health Agency would fund allotment schemes in North Down to encourage healthy living.
(AQW 19262/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency continues to develop its work with local groups and communities across the North Down area to encourage, support and fund the development of community allotment projects such as the Kilcooley Allotments project.

In the last year the Agency's South Eastern Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement team have also provided smaller amounts of resource through its community grant scheme to help local groups develop allotments and gardens within disadvantaged areas.

Recently "Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland" have been commissioned by the team to work with them in designing a community allotments support programme that will be rolled out in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

The project will be formally launched in the near future across the South Eastern area including North Down, and will involve working with a minimum of five local groups per year.

Health: Waiting Times

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail, for each Health and Social Care Trust, the (i) target waiting time; and (ii) actual waiting time for all procedures with a current waiting list of greater than eight weeks
(AQW 19307/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) I have set a challenging waiting time target for elective care inpatient/daycase treatment that covers all clinical specialties. This is:

- From April 2012, at least 50% of inpatients and daycases are treated within 13 weeks with no one waiting longer than 36 weeks; increasing to 60% by March 2013, and no patient waits longer than 30 weeks for treatment.

(ii) My Department publishes inpatient waiting time figures on a quarterly basis in the Northern Ireland Waiting Time publication, on the basis of clinical specialty, and not procedure type. The latest data published relate to the position at 30th September 2012 and can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ni_inpatient_waiting_list_bulletin_september_12.pdf

I refer you to Table 2a, which details the number of people waiting for admission by weeks waiting, broken down by specialty.

Information on the waiting times for specific procedures are available on request, but are not routinely published given the volume of procedure types that may be carried out, which at 30th September 2012 totalled nearly 2,000.

All Party Group on Muscular Dystrophy: Collum Report

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will respond to the recommendations made in the Collum report which was compiled by the All Party Group on Muscular Dystrophy.
(AQW 19341/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am currently considering my response and will respond to the All Party Group on Muscular Dystrophy very shortly.

Halal Meat Products

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps the Food Standards Agency is taking following traces of pork DNA found in halal meat products supplied by a local distributor.
(AQW 19353/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) was made aware of the discovery of traces of pork DNA in a selection of meat pies labelled as Halal by the Prison Service of England and Wales on the evening of Thursday 31 January. This is not a food safety issue, however it is totally unacceptable, particularly to those faith communities who abstain from eating pork.

In accordance with established protocols, the FSA is working closely with the relevant authorities to investigate this incident to ascertain details around the supply chain and any necessary action to be taken.

As part of the investigation, the FSA has instigated a program of enhanced food standards inspections of approved meat products and preparations establishments across the UK. In Northern Ireland, this work is being conducted by District Councils, with the program of work commencing on 6 February 2013. The FSA has also instigated a UK wide study to investigate the presence of undeclared equine and porcine DNA in product containing beef from a range of food businesses. In Northern Ireland this work is being carried out by District Councils. This program of work is being conducted with the purpose of ensuring that consumers' interests are being protected in relation to the declaration of species in meat products.

Shale Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether his Department will review the report on the Chief Medical Officer's Recommendations Concerning Shale Gas Development in New Brunswick by Dr Eilish McCleary; (ii) whether the Department plans to give any consideration to the public health implications of the proposals to extract shale gas; and (iii) why no one from his Department, who works in the field of public health, is represented on the cross-departmental Shale Gas Forum.
(AQW 19437/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) My Department has considered the report by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health concerning shale gas development in New Brunswick, Canada.

(ii) The Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides support and specialist advice to my Department on a wide range of health protection matters. HPA has undertaken to review the potential health impacts of shale gas extraction. It is anticipated that this scoping report will be available in the near future.

(iii) My Department is represented on the Shale Gas Regulators' Forum by an official from the Public Health Advice Directorate.

Organ Donation

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent announcement on organ donation, to explain why this issue was not included in the Programme for Government.
(AQW 19449/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Programme for Government, as a strategic document, includes a number of commitments and associated milestones for each Department. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list of everything that any given Department will deliver upon.

During the life cycle of a Programme for Government, Departments will continue to develop new policy and update existing policy as part of their normal remit, as is the case with my recent announcement on organ donation.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will announce his decision on the future of paediatric cardiac surgery provision at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.[R]
(AQW 19461/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to the answer that I gave to AQO'S 3137/11-15 and 3146/11-15.

Horses: Slaughtering

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the Urgent Oral Question on 5 February 2013, where horses have been slaughtered in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19464/11-15)

Mr Poots: Oakdale Meats (NI) Ltd in Lurgan is currently the only establishment in Northern Ireland approved for the slaughter of horses (in addition to being approved for cattle and sheep slaughter). I understand however, that the food business operator has recently taken a commercial decision to discontinue the slaughter of horses. There was historically a small number of horses slaughtered for human consumption from this plant.

Wind Farms

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has ever been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications for residents and unborn children living in close proximity to wind farms.
(AQW 19473/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to wind farms.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of wind turbines. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Wind Turbines

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research has been carried out by his Department or any other Department on the health implications of wind turbines.
(AQW 19475/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to wind farms.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of wind turbines. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Wind Turbines

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the outcome of any research that his Department has carried out in relation to the health implications of wind turbines.
(AQW 19476/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to wind farms.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of wind turbines. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electricity: Pylons

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has ever been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications for residents and unborn children living in close proximity to electricity pylons.
(AQW 19477/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to electricity pylons or electricity substations.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of electricity pylons or electricity substations. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) are both produced wherever electricity is used. Common sources are electrical wiring and appliances in the home, electricity substations and electricity power lines.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides support and specialist advice to DHSSPS on a wide range of health protection matters including radiation protection. The role of HPA in this regard includes maintaining an oversight of relevant national and international research, reviews and guidance produced by authoritative and competent scientific bodies such as the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), the European Commission Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the HPA's own independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR).

In 2004 the Health Protection Agency (HPA) Radiation Protection Division (formerly the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)) published advice on limiting public exposure to electromagnetic fields following an extensive review of the science and a public consultation. This advice recommended the adoption in the UK of guidelines from ICNIRP for limiting exposures to EMFs. This advice remains extant. The European Council Recommendation EC/519/1999 adopts the same levels.

HPA advise that the evidence to date suggests that in general there are no adverse effects on the health of the population of the UK caused by exposure to EMFs below the guideline levels.

HPA has also developed advice in response to the SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields) recommendation for more information to be provided to people about exposures and the actions they could take to reduce exposures. This information is available on the HPA web site.

Electricity: Pylons

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what research has been carried out by his Department or any other Department on the health implications of electricity pylons.
(AQW 19478/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to electricity pylons or electricity substations.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of electricity pylons or electricity substations. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) are both produced wherever electricity is used. Common sources are electrical wiring and appliances in the home, electricity substations and electricity power lines.

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HPA has also developed advice in response to the SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields) recommendation for more information to be provided to people about exposures and the actions they could take to reduce exposures. This information is available on the HPA web site.

Cancer

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what preventative measures are being taken to reduce the high level of new cancer incidence being diagnosed in North Down.
(AQW 19480/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information in the Health Committee's recent report on Health Inequalities indicated that North Down had the highest cancer prevalence rate (18 per 1,000). However, following standardisation for the age of the population, rates of all cancers combined were 7.1% lower for males and 6.4% lower for females in North Down than the Northern Ireland average.

The Department has brought forward measures for the prevention and early detection of cancer including:

- the Cancer Prevention, Treatment and Care Service Framework;
- Bowel cancer and breast cancer screening programmes and, for Cervical cancer, screening and the HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) immunisation programme;
- Development of the new public health strategic framework and a number of underpinning health improvement strategies. In particular: –
    - Lung cancer and other smoking related cancers - a new ten-year tobacco control strategy in 2012;

- Melanoma and other Skin cancers - a new strategy for prevention of skin cancer in July 2011 as well as the commencement of the sunbed legislation;
- The New Strategic Direction for Drugs and Alcohol; and
- The Obesity Prevention Strategic Framework.

Preventative services for residents of North Down are commissioned and/or provided by the Public Health Agency and the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, as well as by primary care, community health development workers, and the Community and Voluntary sector:

- Regional cancer awareness programmes - in the last year these have focused on Breast, Bowel, Skin, Lung, Cervical and Oral Cancer; and
- A range of locally provided health improvement programmes including:
  - Smoking cessation services targeting young people, manual workers, individuals residing in areas of deprivation, and pregnant women and their partners;
  - Skin cancer prevention programmes (such as Living Willows);
  - Physical activity and weight programmes (such as Bike-it and the Healthwise Physical Activity Referral Programme);
  - Healthy eating programmes (such as Cook it! and Community allotments/gardens); and
  - A new alcohol project delivering brief intervention services to hazardous drinkers across the South Eastern area in GP practices.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: Clark Clinic

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the future of Clark Clinic at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children.
(AQW 19482/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to the answer that I gave to AQO'S 3137/11-15 and 3146/11-15.

Card Before You Leave Scheme

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that the Card Before You Leave Scheme will be maintained for the foreseeable future.
(AQW 19506/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has confirmed that the Card Before You Leave (CBYL) Scheme will be maintained for the foreseeable future. It is fully operational and well embedded in all Trusts.

The HSCB's evaluation of the scheme is expected to be completed shortly. Any work emerging from this review will be progressed through the joint PHA and HSCB Self Harm Working Group.

Paediatric Cardiac Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is being done to ensure that the standards of paediatric cardiac care are maintained during the current review of the service.
(AQW 19513/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that the Health and Social Care Board continues to ensure that robust arrangements are in place for all children who require cardiac care. All centres undertaking surgery on children from Northern Ireland submit outcome data to the centrally held register, the Congenital Cardiac Audit Database (CCAD), which publishes information on mortality rates for surgical and cardiological interventional procedures.

DHSSPS: Capital Spend

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's capital spend since May 2011, broken down by constituency area.
(AQW 19518/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure is not currently collated or monitored at constituency level.

My Department's capital spend for 2011/12 was £204.5m. The approved capital budget for 2012/13 is £325m.The following table provides a breakdown of the spend by Trusts and other Bodies:

Trust/ Body	Actual Spend 2011/12	Projected Spend 2012/13
Belfast	£78.7m	£55.8m
Northern	£21.5m	£35.2m
South Eastern	£24.5m	£22.7m

Trust/ Body	Actual Spend 2011/12	Projected Spend 2012/13
Southern	£20.5m	£25.6m
Western	£36.3m	£144.5m
NIAS	£3.4m	£3.8m
NIFRS	£4.7m	£2.4m
HSCB	£2.7m	£1.6m
BSO	£3.3m	£8.7m
Other Agencies	£0.7m	£0.8m
Dept Spend/Other	£8.2m	£23.9m
Total	**£204.5M**	**£325M**

Electricity: Pylons

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the outcome of any research that his Department has carried out in relation to the health implications of electricity pylons.
(AQW 19539/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to electricity pylons or electricity substations.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of electricity pylons or electricity substations. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) are both produced wherever electricity is used. Common sources are electrical wiring and appliances in the home, electricity substations and electricity power lines.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides support and specialist advice to DHSSPS on a wide range of health protection matters including radiation protection. The role of HPA in this regard includes maintaining an oversight of relevant national and international research, reviews and guidance produced by authoritative and competent scientific bodies such as the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), the European Commission Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the HPA's own independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR).

In 2004 the Health Protection Agency (HPA) Radiation Protection Division (formerly the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB)) published advice on limiting public exposure to electromagnetic fields following an extensive review of the science and a public consultation. This advice recommended the adoption in the UK of guidelines from ICNIRP for limiting exposures to EMFs. This advice remains extant. The European Council Recommendation EC/519/1999 adopts the same levels.

HPA advise that the evidence to date suggests that in general there are no adverse effects on the health of the population of the UK caused by exposure to EMFs below the guideline levels.

HPA has also developed advice in response to the SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields) recommendation for more information to be provided to people about exposures and the actions they could take to reduce exposures. This information is available on the HPA web site.

Electricity: Substations

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has ever been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications for residents and unborn children living in close proximity to electricity substations.
(AQW 19540/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to electricity pylons or electricity substations.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of electricity pylons or electricity substations. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) are both produced wherever electricity is used. Common sources are electrical wiring and appliances in the home, electricity substations and electricity power lines.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides support and specialist advice to DHSSPS on a wide range of health protection matters including radiation protection. The role of HPA in this regard includes maintaining an oversight of relevant national and international research, reviews and guidance produced by authoritative and competent scientific bodies such as the

International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), the European Commission Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the HPA's own independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR).

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HPA has also developed advice in response to the SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields) recommendation for more information to be provided to people about exposures and the actions they could take to reduce exposures. This information is available on the HPA web site.

Electricity: Substations

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the outcome of any research that his Department has carried out in relation to the health implications of electricity substations.
(AQW 19541/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not been asked by any other Department to consult on the health implications of living in close proximity to electricity pylons or electricity substations.

My Department has not commissioned any research on the health implications of electricity pylons or electricity substations. My Department is not aware of any research carried out by any other Department on this issue.

Electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) are both produced wherever electricity is used. Common sources are electrical wiring and appliances in the home, electricity substations and electricity power lines.

The Health Protection Agency (HPA) provides support and specialist advice to DHSSPS on a wide range of health protection matters including radiation protection. The role of HPA in this regard includes maintaining an oversight of relevant national and international research, reviews and guidance produced by authoritative and competent scientific bodies such as the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), the European Commission Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the HPA's own independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR).

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HPA has also developed advice in response to the SAGE (Stakeholder Advisory Group on extremely low frequency electromagnetic fields) recommendation for more information to be provided to people about exposures and the actions they could take to reduce exposures. This information is available on the HPA web site.

Department of Justice

Prisons: Maintenance

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of maintenance of prisons, in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 18956/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The cost of maintenance of prisons in each of the last three financial years is set out in the table below:

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
£	5,110,863	4,955,591	5,092,864

Prisoners: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the daily cost per prisoner to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 18959/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not calculate the daily cost per prisoner but rather the average cost per prisoner place, which is published in its Annual Report and Accounts.

In 2011-12 the cost per prisoner place was £71,398. This is equivalent to a daily cost per prisoner place of £195.61

Firearms: Prohibition Removal Applications

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how many Article 63 firearm prohibition appeals have been received in each of the last 5 years broken, down by constituency.
(AQW 18971/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice became responsible for applications for the removal of prohibition that do not involve national security under Article 63 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 on 12 April 2010. Information is not routinely held by constituency but has been collated insofar as possible. The information available from that date is set out below:

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2010	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1	0
	Mid Ulster	3	0
	Upper Bann	1	0
	West Tyrone	1	0
	Total	**6**	**0**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2011	Belfast East	1	0
	Belfast West	1	0
	East Londonderry	3	0
	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	4	1
	Mid Ulster	3	0
	Newry and Armagh	1	0
	North Antrim	3	0
	North Down	1	0
	South Antrim	1	1
	Upper Bann	5	1
	West Tyrone	3	0
	Total	**26**	**3**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2012	Belfast East	1	0 (not yet determined)
	Belfast North	2	2
	East Londonderry	2	0 (1 not yet determined)
	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1	0
	Lagan Valley	1	0
	Newry and Armagh	1	0

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
	North Antrim	1	0
	North Down	1	0 (not yet determined)
	Upper Bann	2	1 (1 not yet determined)
	West Tyrone	4	0 (2 not yet determined)
	Total	**16**	**3**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2013	Belfast West	1	not yet determined
	Newry and Armagh	1	not yet determined
	Total	**2**	

Eight applications have been included in the tables as received but as yet have no outcome.

One prohibition had expired when the application was received.

Firearms: Prohibition Removal Applications

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how many Article 63 firearm prohibition appeals have been successful in each of the last 5 years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 18972/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice became responsible for applications for the removal of prohibition that do not involve national security under Article 63 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 on 12 April 2010. Information is not routinely held by constituency but has been collated insofar as possible. The information available from that date is set out below:

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2010	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1	0
	Mid Ulster	3	0
	Upper Bann	1	0
	West Tyrone	1	0
	Total	**6**	**0**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2011	Belfast East	1	0
	Belfast West	1	0
	East Londonderry	3	0
	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	4	1
	Mid Ulster	3	0
	Newry and Armagh	1	0
	North Antrim	3	0
	North Down	1	0

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
	South Antrim	1	1
	Upper Bann	5	1
	West Tyrone	3	0
	Total	**26**	**3**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2012	Belfast East	1	0 (not yet determined)
	Belfast North	2	2
	East Londonderry	2	0 (1 not yet determined)
	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1	0
	Lagan Valley	1	0
	Newry and Armagh	1	0
	North Antrim	1	0
	North Down	1	0 (not yet determined)
	Upper Bann	2	1 (1 not yet determined)
	West Tyrone	4	0 (2 not yet determined)
	Total	**16**	**3**

Year prohibition removal application received;	Constituency of applicant;	Number of prohibition removal applications received;	Number of successful applications;
2013	Belfast West	1	not yet determined
	Newry and Armagh	1	not yet determined
	Total	**2**	

Eight applications have been included in the tables as received but as yet have no outcome.

One prohibition had expired when the application was received.

Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases per court division are currently in the court system in relation to charges brought under the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.
(AQW 18973/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 27 January 2013, there were a total of 29 active cases against which a Certificate under Section 1 of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (the Act) has been issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Court Division	Belfast	Londonderry	Total
Cases	28	1	**29**

Section 4 of the Act provides for these cases to be held in Belfast unless the Lord Chief Justice otherwise directs.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the estimated total cost of compensation payments made to date to Northern Ireland Prison Service staff who were wrongly suspended or dismissed, for any reason, on the recommendation of the Prisoner Ombudsman.
(AQW 18975/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to the reply I provided to AQW/18562/11-15 on 1 February 2013.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Consultants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17940/11-15, whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service intends to engage more consultants.
(AQW 18976/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) has engaged its Integrated Design Team Framework to progress the delivery of several business cases during the next twelve months as well as the Business Consultancy Service (BCS) to profile the potential benefits of its Reform Programme.

The full scope of the requirements to resource the NIPS Reform Programme is currently under development, including staffing requirements.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Northern Ireland Prison Service staff since 2004 have been dismissed but subsequently have had the decision overturned by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeal Board; and how many were reinstated in their posts or awarded compensation.
(AQW 18977/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 2004 seven individuals dismissed from the Northern Ireland Prison Service have had this decision overturned by the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeal Board and were awarded compensation.

Convictions: Disclosure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the circumstances in case 13/008028 which enabled the offender to register with a recruitment agency to which he failed to disclose his convictions, and obtained work abroad whilst subject to a notification order; (ii) the agencies that were tasked with monitoring the offender; and (iii) any other actions taken to monitor the behaviour of the offender.
(AQW 18990/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this case is before the court, it would not be appropriate for me to provide any detail.

Prisoners: Supporting Prisoner-at-risk Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18303/11-15 and following the inspection at Maghaberry Prison between 19-23 March 2012, which identified a number of deficiencies in the Supporting Prisoner at Risk procedures and in the December 2012 report, recommended that arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable prisoners should be strengthened and reflect regional guidance and that Supporting Prisoner at Risk procedures should be improved with a particular focus on case management and reviews, whether the alteration of current Supporting Prisoner at Risk procedures could be of assistance in addressing problems, or whether the issues in relation to Supporting Prisoner at Risk procedures have been rejected.
(AQW 19013/11-15)

Mr Ford: Maghaberry Prison has accepted the recommendation that Supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) procedures should be improved with a particular focus on case management and reviews. Representatives from the Prisoner Safety and Support Team participate in SPAR case conferences, ensuring good multi-disciplinary representation and case management. Regular audits of SPAR documentation are also completed.

Prisons: Night Custody Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to concerns raised in the report into the investigation of the closure of the Prisoner Assessment Unit, whether night custody staff were trained in control and restraint techniques.
(AQW 19014/11-15)

Mr Ford: Night Custody Officers were trained in Control and Restraints as part of their induction into the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Prison Officers' Association

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of law firms which are retained by the Prison Officers' Association and their locations and; (ii) whether prison officers who are members of the Prison Officers' Association and would prefer to instruct a solicitor of their choice in duty related matters, will receive Prison Officers' Association funding or whether the Prison Officers' Association only provides funding to officers who use a firm that has been retained by the Association.
(AQW 19015/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Officers' Association is an independent body and the Member may wish to write to it directly about this matter.

Criminal Justice Inspection: Review of DARD Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18193/11-15 and AQW 18189/11-15, and given that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development requested that the Criminal Justice Inspectorate conduct an independent inspection of the Central Investigation Service, why he did not facilitate this with a change in legislation.
(AQW 19021/11-15)

Mr Ford: No approach was made to me or to my officials to add the DARD's Central Investigation Service to the list of organisations that can be inspected by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland. I am advised that in May 2010 the DARD Permanent Secretary spoke with the Deputy Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) with a view to CJI conducting an independent review of the DARD Central Investigation Service and was advised CJI did not have the statutory remit to conduct an investigation into an organisation that is not specified in section 46 of the of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

I have previously advised that I will consult the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Chief Inspector on this issue.

Prison Service Trust: Contributions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how much his Department has contributed to the Prison Service Trust in each of last three years; (ii) what is the projected funding to the Trust for each of the next two years; (iii) what services are offered by or through the Trust; and (iv) whether the services provided by the Trust are available to all Prison Service staff.
(AQW 19050/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table A below shows the contribution provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) to the Prison Service Trust (PST) in each of the last three financial years:

Table A

	2009-10 £000	**2010-11 £000**	**2011-12 £000**
Grant funding by NIPS to the Prison Service Trust	298	298	302

The projected funding to the PST in each of the next two financial years is shown in table B below:

Table B

	2012-13 * £000	**2013-14 £000**	**2014-15 £000**
Projected funding by NIPS to the Prison Service Trust	298	289	284

* The 2012-13 funding has also been provided for completeness.

The PST provides healthcare, life planning and support services. These services are offered to its client base which includes serving members who donate to the Trust, family members of murdered officers and officers who died in service or retired on ill-health grounds.

This does not preclude the Trust from the provision of other services, or to persons other than those within the client group from monies other than those received by government grant, i.e. member subscriptions.

Maghaberry Prison: Acting Governor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Acting Governor of HMP Maghaberry (i) was assaulted whilst in the course of his work; (ii) whether this was by a prisoner; and (iii) whether the person was charged.
(AQW 19071/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no "Acting Governor" of Maghaberry Prison. The Governor has confirmed that there have been no assaults or injuries at work involving those in the Governor grades.

Human Trafficking: National Crime Agency

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the benefits that the National Crime Agency could provide in tackling human trafficking.
(AQW 19072/11-15)

Mr Ford: The plan was that the National Crime Agency (NCA) would build on the functions and expertise of the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the UK Human Trafficking Centre to provide an enhanced approach to tackling human trafficking. The Executive, however, has not supported the extension of the NCA to Northern Ireland.

The Department of Justice is now working with the Home Office and other relevant partners to establish what the impact will be. The aim is to continue to tap into the NCA's expertise in tackling all crime types, including human trafficking. I still hope to see, for instance, the sharing of information and provision of advice; but the NCA will not have an operational role here. As a result it will not be able to undertake civil recovery against human traffickers or directly assist in human trafficking operations in Northern Ireland.

Prison Officers' Association

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the legal costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Prison Officers' Association, related to members in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, for each of the last seven years.
(AQW 19073/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Officers' Association is an independent body and the Member may wish to write to it directly about this matter.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18357/11-15, to detail (i) the dates that the figures supplied relate to; (ii) when this case first went to court; (iii) on what date Legal Aid was granted; and (iv) the total counsel fees submitted to date, or the estimated total based on the level and number of counsel involved and the duration of the case.
(AQW 19074/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figures provided in AQW/18357/11-15, relate to magistrates court proceedings which ran from 21 January 2009 to 25 February 2009. The first court attendance was 21 January 2009 and legal aid was granted on that date. No counsel fees have been submitted to date. The defendants were committed for trial to the Crown Court and VHCC certificates have been granted in respect of these proceedings. These fees will be determined by the Taxing Master on the basis of a time-based claim. It is not possible to estimate the total fees at this time.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 19095/11-15)

Mr Ford: No departmental functions will be transferred from the Department of Justice to local government under the Review of Public Administration.

Court Apparel

Mr Rogers asked Minister of Justice whether he plans to review the practice of wigs and gowns being worn by personnel, other than judges, in courts.

(AQW 19108/11-15)

Mr Ford: The practice of wigs and gowns being worn in court by the legal profession is a matter for their relevant professional bodies. I have no plans to review the court dress worn by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals staff who support the judiciary in the role of tipstaff or court crier.

G8 Summit: Policing Costs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice what assurances he has received from the British Government with regard to covering the additional policing costs which may arise from the G8 summit taking place in Fermanagh in June 2013.
(AQW 19147/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Office committed to ensuring PSNI have the resources required to deliver a safe and secure summit. The PSNI are developing cost estimates to be reviewed by my officials, which will form the basis of discussions with HM Treasury, led by DFP on behalf of the Executive.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Financial Assistance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18104/11-15, whether all financial assistance available will be paid by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to staff forced from their homes; and for how long temporary accommodation costs will be paid to allow purchase of a new home.
(AQW 19152/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service will reimburse in full those costs necessarily incurred as a result of removal. Assistance with temporary accommodation is normally limited to six months.

Gerry McGeough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) what measures are in place to ensure Gerry McGeough complies with the terms and conditions of his release; (ii) the course of action that will be taken if the terms and conditions are breached; and (iii) whether the implications for the victim in this case were considered.
(AQW 19155/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of the legislation under which Mr Gerry McGeough was released (the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998) remains the responsibility of the Secretary of State. That legislation requires fixed term prisoners released under its terms to comply with two conditions, namely, that the individual does not support a specified organisation (within the meaning of Section 3 of the aforementioned Sentences Act) and that they do not become concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

An individual believed to be in breach of these conditions may be liable to have his licence suspended by the Secretary of State and be returned to prison and to have his case considered thereafter by the independent Sentence Review Commissioners. The Sentences Act provides for the Secretary of State to give victims information about releases where she has received a written request to do so.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18253/11-15, (i) how many of the 26 staff dismissed for gross misconduct from the Northern Ireland Prison Service, exercised their right of appeal to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeal Board; (ii) how many of those who lodged a Notice of Appeal against dismissal subsequently withdrew the appeal prior to the hearing taking place; (iii) of those former staff who withdrew appeals, how many received a payment from the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and (iv) of those former staff who received such payment, how many were reinstated to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 19156/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to the response provided to AQW 18253/11-15.

15 staff exercised their right to appeal to NICSAB.

Prisoners: Supporting Prisoner-at-risk Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how Supporting Prisoner at Risk procedures will be improved with a particular focus on case management and reviews, as recommended in the inspection report on Maghaberry Prison on 19-23 March 2012.
(AQW 19158/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Safety and Support Team within Maghaberry now attend and quality assure Supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) case conferences ensuring good multi-disciplinary representation and case management. In addition, a new auditing system for SPAR booklets has been developed and implemented.

Prisoners: Monitoring and Supervision on Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Prisoner A, who was responsible for the monitoring and supervision of this person after release from prison.
(AQW 19159/11-15)

Mr Ford: Where licence conditions are imposed on persons released from prison they are monitored by the Probation Board with support, where appropriate, from the PSNI, Prison Service and DOJ.

Woburn House

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice for an update on plans for the Northern Ireland Prison Service site at Woburn House/ Lisnevin, Millilse.
(AQW 19178/11-15)

Mr Ford: The site will continue in its present role as the Prison Service College until the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat is completed. Thereafter, the Millisle site will be advertised for sale on the open market.

Professional Standards Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17980/11-15, whether the Professional Standards Unit will have a remit to investigate (i) the conduct of senior staff and governors; and (ii) retrospective issues against staff employed in the Prison Service.
(AQW 19228/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Professional Standards Unit will have responsibility for all staff but will not deal with retrospective cases.

Magilligan and Hydebank Wood: New Technology

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the evaluation of the pilot schemes to test new technology at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood which were announced by the Director General in August 2012.
(AQW 19229/11-15)

Mr Ford: The three month pilots of millimetre wave technology at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre have now concluded and the results of the pilots are currently being evaluated.

Prisoners: Death in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the official Terms of Reference for Investigation of Deaths in Prison Custody by the Prisoner Ombudsman, (i) what is meant by the "discretion of the Ombudsman to investigate to the extent appropriate in cases, that raise issues about the care provided by the prison service"; (ii) whether the Ombudsman has the legislative power to pursue or investigate matters of residual discipline concerning staff who have not directly contributed to the circumstances surrounding a death in custody, or when not on duty at the time in question; (iii) under which legislation the Ombudsman has this power; (iii) in how many cases the Ombudsman has pursued prison staff by way of investigation in terms of evidence gathering supplied to the Prison Service; (iv) to provide the number of cases of death in custody since the Ombudsman took office, in which the issue of the suspension of staff was discussed between the Ombudsman, the Director General or the Deputy and where undertakings were given by the Prison Service that prison staff would be suspended.
(AQW 19230/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Within the Prisoner Ombudsman's Terms of Reference, the Ombudsman has discretion to investigate, to the extent appropriate, cases that raise issues about the care provided by the prison, and the Ombudsman will consider the circumstances of a death where the individual is on temporary release or has been recently released from custody. In exercising discretion, the Ombudsman will consider concerns of the family, medical treatment while in custody, and post release, discharge arrangements and issues of individual vulnerability.

(ii) The Ombudsman does not have legislative power to pursue investigations.

(iii) As per (ii).

(iv) The Ombudsman does not pursue prison staff during investigations; rather investigations are intended to identify the facts surrounding the circumstances of a death in custody.

(v) I refer to AQW 18562/11-15, and confirm that the Ombudsman has not been involved in discussions with the Director General or Deputy on suspension of prison staff, although the Ombudsman was informed of the intention to suspend staff members pending a full internal disciplinary investigation.

Maghaberry Prison: Prisoner Reception

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the findings by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland following inspection at Maghaberry between 19 and 23 March 2002 and the subsequent recommendation in the December 2012 Report that the length of time prisoners spend in reception should be significantly reduced and initial health interviews shortened, whether health screening and access to appropriate healthcare is a Prison Service core business aim; and whether health screening will be included within its performance monitoring system as purposeful activity.
(AQW 19231/11-15)

Mr Ford: A continuous change programme is currently ongoing to reduce the time prisoners need to spend in reception. However, the individual needs of each prisoner need to be assessed prior to their first night in Custody.

Delivery of Healthcare services within the Northern Ireland Prison Service is the responsibility of the South Eastern Trust.

The Trust is committed to providing services which are equivalent to those provided to the wider community. While the Trust has put procedures in place to improve and streamline healthcare screening during the committal process, it remains an important opportunity for newly committed prisoners to discuss medical conditions, chronic disorders and any outstanding hospital or GP appointments. Healthcare screenings also provide the opportunity to ensure that prisoners receive timely and appropriate healthcare to meet their clinical needs when committed to prison.

PSNI: Additional Personnel

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what recent discussions he has held with the Chief Constable regarding levels of additional personnel required and the range of their deployment.
(AQW 19240/11-15)

Mr Ford: PSNI personnel matters, including recruitment and deployment, are an operational matter for the Chief Constable. However, the Chief Constable has advised me that the PSNI is currently conducting a review of their resilience and capability against demands going forward. This review will form the basis of any future business case in relation to the recruitment of additional officers, will be evidence based and conducted in an ethos of scrutiny and challenge, to ensure that there is a well articulated and understood assessment of future need.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18452/11-15, what is the closing date for the public sector trawl; and when an announcement on future usage will be made.
(AQW 19256/11-15)

Mr Ford: The closing date for expressions of interest in Bangor Courthouse was 7 February 2013. Land & Property Services has advised that some flexibility in time limits is allowed and that they would not refuse a serious expression of interest within any reasonable timescale, provided that no open market sale was imminent.

There is no procedure for the announcement of the expression of interest exercise or for open market sales of property.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18141/11-15, whether the decision on how the residue is spent will be a matter for the Executive as a whole or for his Department.
(AQW 19258/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Part Time Reserve Gratuity terms and conditions were set by the Northern Ireland Office, in agreement with HM Treasury. My Department administered the Scheme on their behalf.

It is a matter for the Department of Justice to determine how the residue will be spent, in consultation with NIO and HM Treasury and not a matter for the Executive as a whole.

Fuel Laundering

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted in connection with illegal fuel laundering in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19267/11-15)

Mr Ford: Fuel laundering offences may be prosecuted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

HMRC have advised that 27 people have been prosecuted in respect of HMRC reported fuels related frauds in the last five financial years, including 2012-13 to date, all of whom have been convicted.

Sexual Abuse: Roman Catholic Priests

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the sentences imposed on Roman Catholic priests in respect of convictions since 2000, for offences of sexual abuse.
(AQW 19321/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my response to AQW/8729/11-15.

Restorative Justice Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how much funding is provided by his Department to Restorative Justice Schemes, in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 19352/11-15)

Mr Ford: The funding provided to Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives through the Department of Justice is set out in the table below.

Financial Year	Community Restorative Justice Ireland	Northern Ireland Alternatives
2010-11	£95,000	£90,000
2011-12	£101,000	£95,000
2012-13	£100,000	£100,000

Attacks on Elderly People

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to increase sentences for those who attack elderly people.
(AQW 19416/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing in the individual case is a matter for the judiciary, taking into account all the circumstances of the offence and any relevant mitigating or aggravating factors in a case. In making these decisions, judges are guided by sentencing guidelines, which indicate that the age and vulnerability of the victim should be treated as an aggravating factor in determining the appropriate sentence.

In the Programme for Government, I have made a commitment to consult with the Lord Chief Justice on sentencing guidelines.

Union Flag: Ballymena Courthouse

Mr Allister asked Minister of Justice (i) why the Union flag was not flown from Ballymena Courthouse on the designated day 6 February 2012; (ii) whether disciplinary or other action has been taken in consequence; (iii) what action has been taken; and (iv) what steps have been taken to prevent this happening again.
(AQW 19565/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Union flag was not flown at Ballymena Courthouse on 6 February 2013 due to an oversight by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Limited (G4S), the security and ancilliary services provider to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS).

Under the terms of the contract with G4S, they are required to fly the Union flag at all court premises on designated flag flying days. G4S were asked for an immediate report on why this failure occurred and have advised that it was due to human error. The NICTS Chief Executive is meeting the Northern Ireland Managing Director of G4S urgently to discuss this matter. Any disciplinary action will be a matter for G4S.

Arlene Arkinson

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the announcement made by Senior Coroner Mr John Leckey on Wednesday 6 February, whether he plans to provide an explanation to the family of the late Arlene Arkinson for the failure to hold an inquest into her death and to ensure that the necessary resources are made available to the Coroners Office to hold a full inquest.
(AQW 19606/11-15)

Mr Ford: The scheduling and holding of an inquest is a matter for the Coroner and I understand that there are a number of outstanding issues which need to be dealt with before the Coroner can convene an inquest. It is not clear what additional resources the Senior Coroner considers are required. Officials will meet with him at the earliest opportunity to discuss his concerns.

Cattle Theft

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Justice in relation to the Clogher Valley area, Co.Tyrone: 'F' District, to detail (i) the number of cattle reported as stolen; (ii) the number of people that have been arrested for cattle theft; and (iii) whether there been any convictions relating to cattle theft, in the last two years.
(AQW 19747/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no specific offence of 'cattle theft' and convictions datasets do not record any information on the nature of items stolen that would allow us to identify convictions for theft of cattle.

While they may not be able to supply data specifically relating to cattle, further information in relation to recorded offences of theft in 'F' District may be obtained by contacting PSNI directly.

Fuel Laundering

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19326/11-15, to detail (i) the law that defines the offence of selling laundered fuel; (ii) the procedures used by the agencies involved in inspecting filling station forecourts to detect laundered fuel; (iii) the penalties for selling laundered fuel; and (iv) the number of successful prosecutions for the sale of laundered fuel, over the last ten years.
(AQW 19748/11-15)

Mr Ford: These are of course reserved matters for which Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is responsible/ accountable to Westminster however they advise that:

(i) The offence of selling laundered fuel is covered by Section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and Section 13 of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979. In addition, any fuel, storage tanks, dispensing pumps, associated equipment and any vehicles fuelled with or containing laundered fuel are liable to seizure and forfeiture under the provisions of section 139 and 141 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

(ii) HMRC Officers use a range of statutory powers to enter premises to test fuel and inspect records including, regulatory powers under Regulations 47 and 48 of the Hydrocarbon Oils Regulations 1973; Search warrants issued under Section 161 of the Customs & Excise Management Act 1979, Search warrants issued under Article 10 of the Police & Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989 and Entry and search of premises after arrest under Article 20 of Police & Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989.

(iii) Upon conviction on indictment the penalty for being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of duty are, a fine of any amount and/or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 7 years. Conviction in summary proceedings has a maximum penalty of 3 times the value of the goods and/or a term of 6 months imprisonment. Following conviction, the Crown may also seek Confiscation Orders in respect of criminal assets.

(iv) It is not possible to identify the number of prosecutions relating specifically to the sale of laundered fuel however, details of the number of successful prosecutions for all types of fuel offences have been provided as answer to AQW 19267/11-15.

Department for Regional Development

Parking Meters

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how his Department sets the Euro currency rate for on-street parking meters.
(AQW 18994/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The Euro currency rate for on-street parking meters was based on the market Euro exchange rate and the direct costs of conversion incurred by the service provider. The Euro currency rate is incorporated into the service provider's contract. This rate is fixed, therefore, Roads Service neither benefits from or is disadvantaged by any currency fluctuations.

Following the commencement of the new Parking Enforcement contract on 30 October 2012, the Euro currency rate is currently being reviewed. I would point out that the provision of the additional facility to accept euro coins incurs additional operational costs in relation to programming, cash handling and banking. Therefore, the exchange rate which is offered for euro coins at the machines needs to take account of the additional costs involved.

Parking Meters

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue his Department has generated as a result of increased Euro exchange rates charged by street parking meters, in each year since 2010.
(AQW 18995/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not generated any revenue from parking, as a result of increased euro exchange rates.

For those Pay and Display machines that accept euro coins, a fixed exchange rate has applied for some considerable time. The rate is programmed into the machines and does not take account of exchange rate fluctuations.

Following the commencement of the new parking enforcement contract with NSL, the euro exchange rate for Pay and Display machines is currently under review. I would point out that the provision of the additional facility to accept euro coins incurs additional operational costs in relation to programming, cash handling and banking. Therefore, the exchange rate which is offered for euro coins at the machines needs to take account of the additional costs involved.

Traffic: Greater Belfast

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average speeds of traffic at peak times on arterial routes in the Greater Belfast area.
(AQW 19051/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service carries out a Journey Time Survey for the Belfast Metropolitan Area on a biennial basis, to measure the journey times on 11 predetermined routes in the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the morning peak traffic period.

The most recent data is contained in the 2011 report and details of average speeds during the morning peak period (07.30 – 09.15) are shown in the table below:

Routes	Total Average Speed (mph)
M2 / A2 Westbound	36.27
M2 / A2 Eastbound	37.15
Newtownards Road Inbound	10.66

Routes	Total Average Speed (mph)
Newtownards Road Outbound	17.73
Orbital (A55) Eastbound	21.33
Orbital (A55) Westbound	19.19
Castlereagh Road Inbound	10.71
Castlereagh Road Outbound	17.16
Ormeau Road Inbound	6.37
Ormeau Road Outbound	21.8
Lisburn Road Inbound	13.85
Lisburn Road Outbound	18.12
M1 / Westlink Inbound	24.57
M1 / Westlink Outbound	49.64
Falls Road Inbound	10.73
Falls Road Outbound	18.5
Crumlin Road Inbound	16.71
Crumlin Road Outbound	16.46
Antrim Road Inbound	18.13
Antrim Road Outbound	22.32
Shore Road Inbound	19.03
Shore Road Outbound	21.46

Traffic: Attendants

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic attendants have been assaulted or injured in the course of their duties, in the last twelve months.
(AQW 19063/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Traffic Attendants are employed by a private company, NSL Services Group (NSL).

NSL has advised that, in 2012, there were 29 cases of physical abuse of Traffic Attendants, with 12 of these cases resulting in injury.

Fixed Penalty Notices

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how many motorists (i) appealed fixed penalty notices issued in 2012; and (ii) had their appeals upheld.
(AQW 19065/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In 2012, some 16,900 challenges to Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) were received. This figure equates to some 15% of all PCNs issued. In the same period, some 9,100 PCN challenges were successful which is approximately 54% of the number of challenges received.

Grit Boxes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to reduce the criteria for grit boxes to be placed on individual streets.
(AQW 19086/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Firstly, I should explain that the policy of my Department's Roads Service in respect of all aspects of winter maintenance is to target the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes.

The Member is aware that on roads adopted or maintained by Roads Service, which do not qualify for inclusion onto the treated road network, salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self-help basis. 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.

When considering requests for the provision of a salt bins, Roads Service carries out an evaluation using a criteria-based system which takes into account various factors, together with residential usage and community facilities including schools, hospitals and care homes for the elderly. To this end, Roads Service already commits significant resources to maintain approximately 4,800 salt bins and over 50,000 grit piles provided on public roads, which it endeavours to constantly replenish throughout the winter period.

As I am sure you will appreciate, Roads Service is required to work within its policy guidelines, which are established to be fair and equitable whilst taking account of the finite levels of resource and expenditure available. Given current financial pressures, I would not be in a position to vary the criteria for the provision of grit boxes on individual streets.

Railways: Ballymena Railway Station

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the future plans for the provision of a ticket office at Ballymena Railway Station.
(AQW 19094/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that they have no immediate plans to permanently reopen the ticket office at Ballymena Railway Station. Staff at Ballymena Station are now required to inspect / sell tickets at the platform areas which provides a much improved visible and mobile staff presence in the station. However they may continue to operate from a ticket office at certain times of the day. Passenger information on where to purchase a ticket is available at the existing office location.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 19096/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Minister for the Environment is currently consulting with Executive Colleagues on the list of functions to transfer under the current programme of Local Government Reform.

Water: Leakages and Defective Pipes

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what percentage of water is currently lost to leakages and defective pipes in the system before point of delivery; and (ii) what effect such defects have on the purity of water.
(AQW 19099/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) the total amount of water entering the water distribution network (referred to as distribution input) in 2011/12 was 584 Ml/d. The level of leakage in 2011/12 was 168 Ml/d of which 122 Ml/d occurs before the point of delivery. It should be noted that both Ofwat and NIAUR do not record the level of leakage as a percentage of distribution input. The reason being that water demand will vary dependent on customer usage and the pertaining weather conditions in any year. (ii) Water mains operate under positive pressure and as such there are no water quality risks associated with leaking defects. NIW has in place a comprehensive sampling and testing programme, overseen by the Drinking Water Inspectorate, to ensure that quality of water delivered to the public meets Regulatory Standards.

Water: Chemicals

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) all chemicals that are added to water and the rationale for doing so; and (ii) the cost of adding such chemicals to the water supply.
(AQW 19100/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that (i) in order to meet the requirements of current Drinking Water Regulations and to provide wholesome drinking water to customers, a number of chemicals are used in the water treatment process to remove impurities present in raw water. The table below details the chemicals which have been approved by the Drinking Water Inspector for use in the water treatment process.

Chemical Type	Purpose
Aluminium and Iron products	Coagulation and removal of organics from raw water; Thickening of the sludge by-product before disposal.
Polyelectrolyte	Used as a coagulant aid in the clarification process.
Lime / Sodium Carbonate / Sulphuric Acid	Adjusts the pH of the water to optimise treatment processes.
Carbon	Enhances removal of organics and pesticides.
Orthophosphoric Acid	Used to reduce plumbosolvency from existing lead pipes.
Chlorine	Disinfection of the final water.

(ii) The cost of chemicals used in the drinking water treatment process is approximately £6.65 million per annum.

Residents Parking Scheme: Bogside Area

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the residents parking scheme for the Bogside area.
(AQW 19101/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Residents Parking Scheme for the Bogside area is progressing through the legislative process and it is anticipated the scheme will be implemented late in 2013.

Roads: Oil Spillages

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what legislation he intends to bring forward to address the problem of oil spillages on roads.
(AQW 19105/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no plans to bring forward specific legislation. Roads Service already has plans in place to deal with roads related incidents, including oil spillages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and responds immediately to any calls regarding such issues.

The policy and procedures that direct Roads Service in its response to oil spillages are aimed at ensuring the safety of road users and preventing oil from entering watercourses or causing other environmental damage.

Treatment of oil spillages is undertaken by trained personnel in accordance with advice from manufacturers and other statutory organisations, such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), as required.

All Roads Service policies and procedures are reviewed on a continuous basis to ensure that all operations are carried out in line with current health and safety procedures.

However, it should be noted that primary responsibility for dealing with oil spillages lies with those who caused the spillage to occur in the first place, although it has to be accepted that it can often be difficult to trace those responsible.

DRD: G8 Summit

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what additional resources his Department will receive to cover any additional costs as a result of hosting the G8 Summit and from where these resources will be allocated.
(AQW 19161/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has made a preliminary assessment of essential works in relation to the G8 Summit and has obtained DFP approval to commence priority works with a view to confirming a full bid in the 2013/14 financial year. This will be funded by displacing some work planned for this year into the 2013/14 financial year. No bids have been made by the Department for additional resources in support of the Summit in the 2012/13 financial year.

Car Parking: Clarawood Estate

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the car parking problems in the Clarawood Estate and whether he has any plans to address these matters.
(AQW 19164/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As with many other social housing estates, Clarawood was designed and built at a time when the level of private car ownership was much lower than it is currently. Roads were primarily intended to provide access, rather than parking. As a result, the level of parking provision is these areas can lead to difficulties for residents seeking to park immediately outside their property. I understand the difficulties this can cause for some residents.

Unfortunately, my Department's Roads Service does not have sufficient resources to simply provide parking at private residences. However, current policy also recognises that the level of car parking may, in certain circumstances, significantly affect road safety or traffic progression on through routes. In such instances, Roads Service may take appropriate action.

In keeping with this aim, Roads Service has already introduced parking and waiting restrictions to ensure the safe movement of vehicles along main routes within the estate. If you wish to highlight other areas of specific concern, I will arrange to have these assessed by Roads Service officials.

Traffic: Management

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has for traffic attendants to assist with traffic management at funerals in town centres.
(AQW 19167/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: With the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) in 2006, the role of Traffic Attendants, as set out in The Traffic Management (NI) Order 2005, is to provide enforcement of decriminalised parking contraventions, on-street, and in Roads Service car parks.

There are no powers to permit Traffic Attendants to provide any other traffic management functions, and this position was supported by the police when DPE was being developed and introduced.

Buses: Banbridge Bus Station

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the plans for the upgrade of Banbridge bus station and the progress to date.
(AQW 19168/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department issued a letter of offer in November 2012 giving approval for Translink to proceed with a project to construct an off street Bus Facility in Banbridge. The estimated costs of the project are £746,000.

Translink has developed a scheme to construct the facility at Kenlis Street in Banbridge and it is in the process of finalising Planning Permission. Translink is also currently engaged in purchasing the land required for the facility. Assuming that Planning Permission is approved and land purchase proceeds without any hold-up, the project is expected to be completed around the end of 2013.

Railways: Portadown Station Staff Car Parking

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what additional provision for staff car parking is available at Portadown Railway Station given the removal of a number spaces to facilitate the new building works.
(AQW 19170/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that there will be 11 spaces provided in the revised car park layout for Translink staff. Prior to the new building works there were 12 spaces for Translink staff.

Roads: Northland Road/Springtown Junction

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Northland Road/Springtown Junction signalisation in Derry, including whether these schemes will be included in the programme for 2013/14.
(AQW 19216/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northland Road/Springtown Junction signalisation scheme in Londonderry is included in my Department's Roads Service 2013/14 works programme for Minor Improvement schemes.

Resident Parking Schemes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the resident parking schemes currently in operation; (ii) resident parking schemes under consideration or in development; and (iii) the process for proposing resident parking schemes including any criteria by which proposals are assessed.
(AQW 19219/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At present there are no Residents' Parking Schemes operating in Northern Ireland, however, a number of schemes are at various stages of development. These are:

- Lower Malone, Stranmillis Road, Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and College Park Avenue/Rugby Road area in Belfast;
- the Bogside area, Londonderry; and
- the Bridge Street/Massereene Street area, in Antrim.

Roads Service considers a number of factors when considering a request for a Residents' Parking Scheme in an area. However, the main task is to identify whether residents in the area are experiencing significant parking difficulties due to non-resident parking. Parking surveys are undertaken to identify the extent of non-resident parking and assess the extent of available off-street parking provision. Schemes will not be introduced, where residential parking is primarily off-street.

A Residents' Parking Scheme will be justified where, during the working day (normally Monday to Friday 8:00am to 6:00pm):

- it is estimated more than 60% of the available kerbside space is occupied by non-residents' vehicles for more than 5 hours; and,
- more than 80% is occupied in total for the same 5 hours.

Outside of these hours, a scheme may be justified where:

- it is estimated more than 40% of the available kerbside space is occupied by non-residents' vehicles for more than any consecutive 4-hour period outside of the working day; and
- more than 80% is occupied in total for the same 4-hour period.

When there appears to be sufficient justification for a scheme, Roads Service officials will draw up draft scheme designs and meet with local residents to discuss the finer details. Upon completion of this local consultation, Roads Service will issue a questionnaire to all households to gauge the level of support for the scheme. To proceed with a scheme, two thirds of responding households must be in favour of the proposed scheme, subject to a minimum response rate of one third of all households. If the response is positive, proposed layouts are then finalised and the necessary legislative arrangements made.

Ports

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the possibilities for further growth at each of Northern Ireland's ports in 2013.
(AQW 19239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have regular meetings with the main public trust ports and officials also meet regularly with the Port of Larne. The main possibilities for further growth in 2013 at the four main commercial ports in Northern Ireland are set out as follows:

The overall cargo tonnage through Belfast Harbour is expected to increase in 2013. Key sectors for growth will be windfarm components, bulk coal, aggregates and freight vehicles. Cruise call bookings currently stand at 58, an increase of 29% on last year.

The current works to improve the A8 road to dualling standard throughout its length are hugely significant for the Port of Larne. They will improve the attractiveness of Larne as a port to haulage/logistics business. While traffic is reduced from its 2007 peak, the upgraded road will place Larne in a good position to grow again as the NI economy recovers.

At Londonderry Port there are significant renewable energy development prospects in Biomass and Anaerobic Digestion and the Port hopes to conclude deals this year which will have long term sustainable growth. The conclusion of a land purchase deal in 2013 to extend the Port's land holding would provide a platform for short and medium term development.

Warrenpoint's potential for growth in the short and long term has been improved by the acquisition of an additional 8 acres of land and over 40,000 Square feet of covered storage. It is hoped that a project to increase covered storage adjacent to the quayside will be complete before the end of 2013 so that the storage can be used to increase volumes in 2013. The additional land will allow the port to free up vital quay space to attract new business. In January 2013 Warrenpoint Port discharged its first coal boat in over 10 years.

Car Parking: Pay and Display Machines

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any assessment has been made in the last twelve months of the reliability of Pay and Display machines that are located in departmental controlled car parks.
(AQW 19241/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department monitors all parking equipment on a monthly basis to ensure it is being maintained in a working condition. This measurement is incorporated into its parking enforcement and car park management contract with NSL Services.

This check measures NSL's performance in seeking to respond to machine faults within 24 hours of reporting, whether the report is automated by the machine or manually. To achieve this Key Performance Indicator (KPI), NSL has to respond within these timescales on at least 98% of occasions in a calendar month. NSL has achieved this KPI during the period January 2012 to December 2012.

Roads: Roundabouts

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he plans to change regulations to allow private companies to sponsor landscaping on roundabouts which are located off the M1 slip ways.
(AQW 19243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: While the Department permits private sponsors to fund the planting and maintenance of roundabouts, verges and available areas within car parks, on the majority of the road network, this facility does not extend to areas adjacent to the motorway network which are classed as "Special Roads". As this roundabout is clearly sited on a Special road no such sponsorship would be permitted in this case.

You will appreciate the motorway network presents its own set of issues, with larger volumes of traffic generally travelling at higher speeds than on the rest of the network. There would be concerns over traffic disruption and safety in terms of safe access, both to those people working on landscaped areas adjacent to motorways and other road users.

Given these circumstances, I would have no plans to allow private companies to sponsor landscaping on roundabouts which are located adjacent to the motorway network and categorised as Special Roads, for example the M12 roundabout near the M1 at junction 11.

Finally, sponsorship on roundabouts off the M1 slip ways which are not Special Roads has been permitted, for example the Saintfield Road Roundabout which is managed by the Lisburn City Council.

Roads: Bloomfield Road, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resolve the flooding on the Bloomfield Road at the Skipperstone Glen area of Bangor.
(AQW 19254/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service's investigations into the flooding at this location on the Bloomfield Road have highlighted that debris and other foreign matter is being washed into the mouth of a culvert that facilitates the passage of water from Skipperstone Glen to Bloomfield Road playing fields.

Roads Service has carried out temporary measures to prevent debris and other foreign matter entering the road culvert, however, a more permanent measure, in the form of installation of a "grill", will be implemented within the next few weeks.

Buses: Depots

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of the bus depots his Department plans to (i) create; and (ii) remove over the next twelve months.
(AQW 19259/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This is an operational matter for Translink, however it has advised me that it continually reviews the performance of its services, including support structures and facilities, to ensure effectiveness and to improve service quality/efficiency.

Grit Boxes: Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many grit boxes there are in Holywood.
(AQW 19263/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service currently provides 52 salt bins and 5 grit piles within the Holywood area.

Water: Metered Property

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria by which a metered property is determined to be either a domestic property or a farm.
(AQW 19290/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the property designation applied by Land and Property Services (LPS) for rating purposes is the basis upon which NIW determines whether a property is domestic or non-domestic and therefore liable for water charges. The term "House (Agricultural)" is used by LPS to describe a farm dwelling. If the water supply to the dwelling is also used for non-domestic purposes, such as farming, then the property is liable for water charges and may be eligible for a domestic allowance in respect of the dwelling.

Water: Leakage Charge

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the policy that allows Northern Ireland Water to charge when leakage has occurred between (i) the meter and a domestic property; (ii) the meter and a farm building or water trough; and (iii) the meter and a commercial building.
(AQW 19294/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the current policy on leakage which affects metered bills seeks to ensure that domestic customers are treated equitably and that non domestic customers are only charged for the services used. In the situations you have described, the policy would be applied as follows:-

(i) If a leak has occurred between the meter and a domestic property, customers can apply to have both the water and (for properties connected to a public sewer) sewerage elements of the bill adjusted provided certain conditions have been met. These conditions relate to the location of the leak, the repair of the leak and whether or not the leak occurred through negligence. A site inspection may be carried out to verify the location and repair of the leak. This policy ensures equality of treatment across all domestic customers.

(ii) In cases where the leak has occurred between the meter and a farm building or water trough, the customer will be billed and will be liable for the cost of all water supplied, whether this has been used or lost through leakage or wastage. This reflects the principle that customers are charged for the services used. Commonly properties of this type are not connected to a public sewer and therefore not liable for sewerage charges (which are linked to the volume of water supplied).

(iii) If a leak has occurred between the meter and a commercial building the customer will be billed and will be liable for the cost of all water supplied (in the same way as agricultural customers), whether this has been used or lost through leakage or wastage. If the commercial property is connected to a public sewer, the customer will also be liable for sewerage charges linked to the volume of water supplied. If the leak has occurred in a location which means that the leaked water does not reach the sewer, then the customer can apply to have the sewerage charges adjusted provided certain conditions have been met. These conditions are the same as those described at (i) above. In this way customers are only charged for the services used.

The detail of this policy is explained in Section 9 of NIW's Code of Practice on Billing and Metering for Non Domestic Customers and in Section 5 of NIW's Scheme of Charges (both can be viewed on NIW's website www.niwater.com).

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the Northern Ireland Water policy in a case where a water leak is undetected by the property owner due to Northern Ireland Water sending bills to the wrong address.
(AQW 19295/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that customers have a responsibility to prevent waste and misuse of water supplies. For this reason, NIW encourages metered customers to check their consumption regularly by reading the meter so that any water leak that may occur is detected and repaired as soon as possible. The receipt of a bill should not be relied upon as a leakage alert because some bills may be based on a system estimate.

Without details of a specific case, NIW is unable to comment on whether or not any address errors were its responsibility.

DRD: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19299/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can confirm that no declarations of interest have been made by my Special Adviser.

Roads: Beechfield and Ashfield Estates, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how he plans to address the crumbling road infrastructure in Beechfield and Ashfield estates, Donaghadee.
(AQW 19305/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service operates a cyclic inspection and repair system whereby any defects in roads and footways requiring remedial action, are noted for repair in line with established maintenance standards. This system is designed to allow Roads Service to react to defects, such as potholes, and carry out repairs to make the area safe for road users and pedestrians.

I am sure the Member will appreciate that Roads Service must prioritise its works programme to optimise use of its finite resources. Whilst I understand the aesthetic appearance of roads in both the Beechfield and Ashfield estates may show signs of wear and tear, along with the presence of patches from previous repairs, there are many other roads within the Ards Borough Council Area, which carry greater traffic volumes, that are considered to be in greater need of resurfacing.

The Member will be aware the footways in the Beechfield estate were replaced some years ago and are in a satisfactory condition, while the entire footway network in the Ashfield estate was replaced last year at a cost of £120k.

Roads Service will, however, continue to keep the Beechfield and Ashfield estates, Donaghadee under consideration for potential inclusion in a future resurfacing programme.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many penalty charge notices have been issued in (i) Bangor; (ii) Holywood; and (iii) Donaghadee in 2012, and how does this compare with 2011.
(AQW 19311/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in Bangor, Holywood and Donaghadee, in each of the last two years, are provided in the table below:

	2011		2012	
Town	PCNs Issued	% of Total PCNs Issued in Northern Ireland	PCNs Issued	% of Total PCNs Issued in Northern Ireland
Bangor	3,291	2.6%	3,706	3.3%
Holywood	1,691	1.3%	1,191	1.1%
Donaghadee	226	0.2%	159	0.1%

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices were issued in Ballymena in 2012 and how this compares with 2011.
(AQW 19327/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in Ballymena, in each of the last two years, are provided in the table below:

Year	PCNs Issued In Ballymena	% of Total PCNs Issued in Northern Ireland
2011	6,855	5.4%
2012	4,693	4.2%

Traffic Calming Measures: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what traffic calming measures are planned for the North Down area over the next year.
(AQW 19350/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in 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

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 future works programmes at this time.

Railways: Investment

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the consultation document on the Future of Railway Investment, to outline the reasons for not utilising the Antrim to Lisburn rail line for passenger services, considering that Northern Ireland Railways pays for the maintenance of the line for emergency diversion and driver training purposes.
(AQW 19394/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The decision to close the Antrim to Lisburn rail line for passenger services in 2003 was made against a background of other competing transportation priorities, taking into account financial feasibility, value for money and wider social and economic considerations. At the time of closure, Translink took the view that the costs of maintaining and modernising the line to retain regular services could not be justified.

The same reasons prevail today and Translink has advised that it has no plans at this time to re-introduce regular services on the line. Any improvement work to bring back passenger services to the Antrim to Lisburn line would require the support of a positive economic appraisal before a bid for funding could be considered.

Looking to the longer term, my Department is carrying out a public consultation to seek views on the priorities for future investment in our railways network beyond the current budget period. Re-opening the Antrim to Lisburn line and establishing a rail link to Belfast International Airport is one of a range of options identified in the consultation, should passenger demand increase in the future to support the necessary capital investment.

Road Safety: Gransha Road, Bangor

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department is planning to take to improve road safety on the Gransha Road, adjacent to Bangor Grammar School.
(AQW 19428/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As part of the planning approval for the new Bangor Grammar School, to which my Department's Roads Service provided input as a consultee, the education authority carried out a number of improvement works including:

- widening the footways at the site frontage along Gransha Road;
- installing a new Puffin enhanced road crossing;
- the relocation of two pedestrian islands on Gransha Road;
- creating a right turn pocket and new road markings on Gransha Road;
- installing 'Safe Routes to School' solar signs;
- the provision of a pedestrian guard rail at entrance of the school;
- providing school bus boarding and drop off points within the school premises;
- creating a dedicated bus lay-by, with lowered kerbs for easier access;
- providing drop-off lay-bys for parents to use on Gransha Road; and
- installing a new bus shelter on Gransha Road.

Roads Service also reviewed the road junctions serving residential areas close to the school entrance, which officials considered had adequate sight splays and footway provision to provide safe access.

The Gransha Road in the vicinity of the school has also previously been provided with central hatching, right turn pockets and central pedestrian refuge islands, which channel the traffic and make it safer for pedestrians to cross the road. In addition, Roads Service has also recently widened the junction of Cranley Road to allow a left turning vehicle to safely pass a right turning vehicle.

Roads Service is aware of public concern relating to road safety on the Gransha Road and in particular, the Gransha Road Roundabout. Officials have started a series of surveys of pedestrian demand and vehicle flow at the roundabout, which will continue during February 2013. This will identify the level of pedestrian demand, now that the school is fully operational, and determine if any further measures are deemed necessary.

Roads: Glenavy to Moira Road

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the work on the Glenavy to Moira road.
(AQW 19434/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service officials recently completed a route improvement study for the A26 strategic route. This study has identified a number of potential improvement schemes and in order to make the best use of resources and ensure best value, Roads Service has prioritised these schemes for implementation.

Work on a scheme to provide a right turning pocket for vehicles leaving the A26 Moira Road at Main Street, Glenavy started on 4 February 2013. It is anticipated this work will be completed in May 2013 and greatly improve safety and assist with traffic progression at this busy junction.

Ferries: Greencastle - Magilligan

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the recent speculation around the establishment of a Greencastle - Greenore Ferry, what progress has been made on the preservation and subvention for the Greencastle - Magilligan Ferry in order to maintain it for the North West region.
(AQO 3380/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The member will know that my Department has no statutory powers in relation to ferry services that go outside Northern Ireland (shipping is a reserved matter), it was not involved in setting up this service and it has no responsibility for its operation. The provision of a ferry service between Magilligan and Greencastle was undertaken by Limavady and Donegal Councils and is operated by a private company. This would also apply to any proposed service between Greencastle in County Down and Greenore.

The Member may be aware that the two Councils recently invited applications from those interested in operating a ferry service between Magilligan and Greencastle for a three year period from 1st April 2013. I understand one application was received to operate the service on the basis of no financial subvention from either Council.

Roads: Unadopted Roads

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the Inquiry into Unadopted Roads by the Committee for Regional Development, for an update on the work he has done in relation to the recommendations.
(AQO 3381/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Committee for Regional Development published the Report on its Inquiry into Unadopted Roads on 4 December 2012.

The report contained 10 recommendations covering a wide range of legal, financial, prioritisation and procedural issues relating to unadopted roads in housing developments. I subsequently tasked Departmental officials to consider and provide detailed opinion, comments and proposals on five of the recommendations that relate to the Department's areas of direct responsibility. When this assessment has been completed, I will be in a position to formally respond to the Report.

In addition, I have written to other stakeholders who are responsible for, or have direct interests in the other five recommendations. These include the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), The Law Society of Northern Ireland, The Construction Employers Federation (CEF), The National House Building Council (NHBC), and the Department of the Environment (DOE). I have also met with representatives from a number of these organisations to discuss a range of issues, where they have specific interests.

Over the forthcoming weeks, I will be carefully considering the feedback from all contributors, and making my formal response to the Committee for Regional Development.

Railways: A2 Road Project

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development what increase is anticipated in rail passenger numbers on the Larne line during the A2 upgrade work.
(AQO 3382/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I announced the award of the A2 upgrade contract on 31 January 2013. Scheme construction should commence early in 2013 and is expected to take two years to complete.

In relation to anticipated increases in rail passengers during the upgrade work, Translink advise that following the introduction of the new timetable, latest figures for passenger growth on Larne rail line already show a tenth increase on last year since the introduction of new trains. While it is difficult to forecast increased passenger numbers as a direct result of the upgrade work, the increased frequency and availability of new trains will help accommodate any further increase in passenger numbers. On the basis of previous experience, for example, Westlink works and the impact on the Portadown rail line approximately a one fifth growth was experienced over a period of 2 years during the works and most of this was subsequently retained as passengers opted to continue to use the train following their experience of enhanced rail services.

Finally, on 7 January 2013, parking charges were suspended at St Brides Car Park, Carrickfergus, near the railway station, in order to provide additional Park & Ride/ Park & Share opportunities during the construction period of the scheme.

Traffic: Gransha Road, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what more his Department can do to improve the flow of traffic and safety of pedestrians using the Gransha Road, Bangor.
(AQO 3383/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will recall my recent response to his similar question regarding the Gransha Road in Bangor.

As part of the planning approval for the new Bangor Grammar School, to which Roads Service provided input as a consultee, the education authority carried out a number of improvement works including:

- widening the footways at the site frontage along Gransha Road;
- installing a new Puffin enhanced road crossing;
- the relocation of two pedestrian islands on Gransha Road;
- creating a right turn pocket and new road markings on Gransha Road;
- installing ‘Safe Routes to School’ solar signs;
- the provision of a pedestrian guard rail at entrance of the school;
- providing school bus boarding and drop off points within the school premises;
- creating a dedicated bus lay-by, with lowered kerbs for easier access;
- providing drop-off lay-bys for parents to use on Gransha Road; and
- installing a new bus shelter on Gransha Road.

Roads Service also reviewed the road junctions serving residential areas close to the school entrance, which officials considered had adequate sight splays and footway provision to provide safe access.

The Gransha Road in the vicinity of the school has also previously been provided with central hatching, right turn pockets and central pedestrian refuge islands, which channel the traffic and make it safer for pedestrians to cross the road. In addition, Roads Service has also recently widened the junction of Cranley Road to allow a left turning vehicle to safely pass a right turning vehicle.

I can assure the Member that Roads Service is aware of public concern relating to road safety on the Gransha Road and in particular, the Gransha Road Roundabout. Officials have started a series of surveys of pedestrian demand and vehicle flow at the roundabout, which will continue during February 2013. This will identify the level of pedestrian demand, now that the school is fully operational, and determine if any further measures are deemed necessary.

Public Transport: Fares

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will ensure that any train or bus fare increases this year will be linked to inflation.
(AQO 3384/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Each year Translink produce a 3 year Corporate Plan which is discussed with my Department. The focus is on the year ahead. Plans are drawn up which take account of Translink’s statutory obligations, funding, costs, fares, fare income and levels of service.

My role, and that of my officials, is to consider the Translink Corporate Plan for each of Metro, Ulsterbus and Northern Ireland Railways. I am of the opinion that any proposed fare increases have to balance social considerations against the commercial obligations placed on Translink. We have managed to ensure only limited fare increases in the last few years. Indeed fares have fallen in ‘real’ terms.

Discussions begin at official level a number of months before the start of the financial year, mainly about funding scenarios. While this process has commenced and I am aware of the issues, discussions are still at an early stage. It is also important to take into account the views of key stakeholders.

Department for Social Development

Housing Associations

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's policy on Housing Associations releasing retention monies to main contractors; and what checks are made to ensure that main contractors pay sub-contractors retention monies on time.
(AQW 18948/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Housing associations release retentions to main contractors in accordance with the relevant conditions of their construction contracts. Generally one half of the retention monies will be released at completion and the remainder at the end of the maintenance period which normally has a twelve month duration.

The Department's Housing Association Guide requires associations to operate a prompt payment policy whereby, unless different terms are agreed in the contract, associations should pay properly claimed amounts to main contractors within 30 days. The Guide also requires associations to include a 'prompt payment' clause in its conditions of contract with the main contractor requiring prompt payment by main contractors to their subcontractors. These prompt payment provisions are applicable to all payments including the release of retentions.

Recent guidance regarding the monitoring of payments to subcontractors has been published by Central Procurement Directorate. This requires the monitoring of payments to subcontractors to be a standing item on the agenda at project meetings with the main contractor providing a report on payments made to subcontractors at each meeting. In addition, the guidance includes a provision that the association's project manager makes periodic checks with subcontractors on the payment performance of the main contractor. Such checks can, if appropriate, be extended to any payments made during or after the maintenance period.

If there are any issues concerning delays in payments these would be investigated by the Departmental inspection team during its rolling programme of Inspections.

It should be noted that it is not intended that there should be any legal liability on associations to enforce the prompt payment provisions in any subcontract. Any remedy under the sub-contract lies with the subcontractor and the legislation on payment of debt available.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 18950/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under the Reform of Local Government my Department will be transferring Housing Functions in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation and Housing Unfitness. In addition legislation will be brought forward that will enable the new Councils to address issues related to social need and to take forward regeneration within their areas.

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development how much maintenance arrears must be accrued before the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division commences enforcement proceedings.
(AQW 18957/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division can seek to refer any case to the Enforcement of Judgments Office where there is a debt to be paid.

Each case is considered on its own merits and there is no prescribed amount that must be first outstanding before this can be considered.

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are in place for Child Maintenance Enforcement Division to take enforcement measures against non-resident parents who are not in work and not on benefits and cannot be contacted.
(AQW 18958/11-15)

Mr McCausland: When a non-resident parent is not in employment or on benefits, alternative means of collecting any outstanding child maintenance are always considered if the non-resident parent is not prepared to make their own arrangements to pay their child maintenance. These measures can include applying to the courts for a liability order to recognise the debt outstanding or the making of an application for a deduction order to recover any money owed directly from a non-resident parent's bank account.

The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division also has access to information about non-resident parents through Service Level Agreements with the credit reference agency Experian as well as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. The

Department can also access information through the Customer Information Service which provides a central store of client data for all government departments.

Personal Independence Payment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 18433/11-15, to detail the number of people (i) who qualify for the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance; and (ii) who are expected to qualify for the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment.
(AQW 18984/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) As at August 2012, 97,110 Disability Living Allowance claimants qualified for higher rate mobility. Of these, 2,500 were aged under 16 and 43,210 were aged 65 and above.*

(ii) Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance for people aged 16 -64 only. Children will continue to receive Disability Living Allowance provided they satisfy the conditions of that benefit until they turn 16. People over the age of 65 who are already receiving Disability Living Allowance will continue to receive that benefit and are unaffected by the introduction of Personal Independence Payment

The new assessment criteria for Personal Independence Payment have been designed to ensure that individuals whose ability to get around is severely impacted by impairments affecting either physical or non-physical abilities may receive the mobility component at the enhanced rate. While it is not possible to pre-empt the outcome of individual assessments under Personal Independence Payment, work is ongoing to provide meaningful and statistically valid estimates on the impact of the introduction of Personal Independence Payment.

*The Information provided is an Official Statistic. The Production and dissemination of all Statistics is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Site Development: Queens Parade Project in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queens Parade project in Bangor.
(AQW 19022/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is in the process of purchasing the landholding assembled by the developer, Karl Greenfarm Properties (KGP) Limited. This transaction is due to be completed by the end of February 2013. Having reviewed the scale of the proposed development on the site, the Department then expects to commence work on assembling the remaining land needed for the development scheme and seeking planning approval for same. This is likely to take up to two years to complete.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what impact a (i) 5 percent; (ii) 10 percent; and (iii) 15 percent rise in the cost of domestic heating oil would have on fuel poverty statistics.
(AQW 19033/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Fuel poverty is influenced by three factors, household income, energy inefficiency and fuel price. While improvements to the energy efficiency of homes can reduce the risk of fuel poverty, it is important to recognise that low income and high fuel prices are the main contributors to fuel poverty. Any increase in the cost of domestic home heating oil will lead to an increase in the level of fuel poverty. However, my Department continues to tackle the causes of fuel poverty which we can have an impact on through our energy efficiency improvement schemes and benefit uptake campaigns.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the expansion of the gas network would have on fuel poverty statistics.
(AQW 19034/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The latest Northern Ireland House Condition Survey reports that almost 70% of households in Northern Ireland use oil to heat their homes. Oil is currently 30 to 35% more expensive than natural gas so switching to gas would lower energy costs and help tackle fuel poverty. On 10 January the Executive approved financial support of up to £32.5 million for the extension of the natural gas network to the main towns in the West and North-West of Northern Ireland, which would potentially serve some 34,000 new gas consumers.

Social Security Appeal Tribunals

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development to list the premises used for social security benefit appeal tribunals, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 19058/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The list of venues used in 2012 and the constituency they are in, is set out in the table below1.

Venue	Constituency
Bedford House, Belfast	Belfast South
Cleaver House, Belfast	Belfast South
Corn Exchange, Belfast	Belfast North
Laganside Courts, Belfast	Belfast South
Ballymena Courthouse	North Antrim
Ballymena Business Centre	North Antrirn
Riada House, Ballymoney	North Antrim
Coleraine Courthouse	East Londonderry
Coleraine Causeway Enterprise Agency	East Londonderry
Coleraine Town Hall	East Londonderry
Limavady Advice Centre	East Londonderry
Central Library, Londonderry	Foyle
City Hotel Londonderry	Foyle
Londonderry Courthouse	Foyle
Millennium Forum, Londonderry	Foyle
Magherafelt Council Offices	Mid Ulster
Signal Centre, Bangor	North Down
Ards Business Centre, Newtownards	Strangford
Newtownards Courthouse	Strangford
Armagh Business Centre	Newry and Armagh
Armagh Courthouse	Newry and Armagh
Banbridge Enterprise Centre	Upper Bann
Downpatrick Courthouse	South Down
Down Business Centre, Downpatrick	South Down
Ballybot House, Newry	Newry and Armagh
Newry Courthouse	Newry and Amiagh
Craigavon Courthouse	Upper Bann
Mount Zion House, Lurgan	Upper Bann
Cookstown Enterprise Centre	Mid Ulster
Dungannon Business Centre	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Enniskillen Business Centre	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Omagh Appeals Service	West Tyrone
Omagh Library	West Tyrone
Omagh Courthouse	West Tyrone
Strabane Enterprise Agency	West Tyrone

1 Appeals listed at these venues are determined by the appellant's postal address and not by constituency.

Empty Homes Strategy

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of vacant houses in each constituency that have been brought back into use through the empty homes strategy.
(AQW 19062/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is responsible for the implementation of its 2007 Empty Homes Strategy. It has informed me that it does not hold information on the number of private properties brought back into use as a result of its

strategy. I find this disappointing and unacceptable. However, it does hold information on its own stock and the table below shows that the number of void properties (by district office) has been reduced from 3634 to 2152 during the period March 2007 to March 2011.

District	2007	2011
West Belfast	54	39
East Belfast	104	60
North Belfast	566	194
Shankill	138	241
South Belfast	44	406
Belfast Area	906	940
Bangor	215	63
Newtownards	203	91
Castlereagh	209	44
Lisburn A St	96	51
Lisburn Dfarm	24	9
Downpatrick	27	32
S.E. Area	774	290
Banbridge	74	26
Newry	87	21
Armagh	89	18
Lurgan/B'low	110	118
Portadown	55	20
Dungannon	60	19
Fermanagh	49	22
South Area	524	244
Ballymena	184	106
Antrim	229	86
N'abbey 1	151	129
N'abbey 2	112	2
C'fergus	68	10
Larne	190	157
Ballycastle	17	6
Ballymoney	8	10
Coleraine	115	24
N.E. Area	1074	530
Waterloo Pl	60	31
Waterside	88	29
Collon Tce	12	16
Limavady	15	10
Magherafelt	28	7
Strabane	63	19
Omagh	73	28
Cookstown	17	8

District	2007	2011
West Area	**356**	**148**
N.I. Total	**3634**	**2152**

I am committed to bringing empty homes back into use and I have tasked the Housing Executive and my officials with developing an appropriately resourced Northern Ireland-wide empty homes strategy and action plan which I expect to see finalised by 31 March 2013.

One of the aims of the Empty Homes Strategy and action plan will be the identification and location of empty homes. To this end my officials are working with colleagues in the Department of Finance & Personnel to ascertain the number of vacant residential properties in each Council area.

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (i) applications for disabled facilities grants in the Newry and Mourne area since 2010; and (ii) applications that were successful.
(AQW 19064/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of applications for Disabled Facilities Grants for the Newry and Mourne Council area since 2010. Preliminary enquiries are deemed to be the number of applications made and approvals are the number of successful applications.

	2010/11	2011/12	Apr – Dec12
Preliminary Enquiries	146	130	82
Approvals	105	79	71

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Business Improvement Districts

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when businesses can apply to become part of the Business Improvement Districts.
(AQW 19089/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not necessary for businesses and local councils to wait for the legislation before starting to develop ideas for a Business Improvement District. Nor do businesses need to apply to become part of a Business Improvement District (BID). Instead, interested groups of businesses can get together with their local council to develop a BID proposal for their area at any time. The proposals are then put to a ballot and voted on by all businesses within the potential BID area to decide on whether or not to go ahead with the proposals and establish the BID.

Volunteering

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development when he will be in a position to award contracts for providers of volunteer services.
(AQW 19107/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to ensuring effective infrastructure support for volunteering in order to successfully deliver on Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy. My Department is presently considering delivery options for such support and I expect new arrangements to be put in place later this year. In the interim period arrangements are being developed by my officials to ensure the continued support for volunteering.

Tenants: Private Properties

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development what legislation is in place to protect tenants in private properties when the property is in need of repairs and maintenance.
(AQW 19110/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 sets out, among other things, the law pertaining to disrepair and unfitness of properties in the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. This legislation is enforceable by local council Environmental Health Officers.

Since 1 April 2007 this legislation has also required the landlord to provide his tenant with a written statement of tenancy terms which must include the repair obligations of both the tenant and the landlord.

Supporting People Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 18470/11-15 and given that 90 percent of the work done by The Northlands Addiction Treatment Centre is on a non-residential basis, whether supporting people funding could be allocated.
(AQW 19115/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Support Services Regulations (NI) 2003 article 3, clearly states that Registered Care Homes are excluded from Supporting People funding. If the organisation can demonstrate to the regulation Quality Improvement Agency (RQIA) that any part of this scheme could be de-registered then an application to NIHE for Supporting People funding may be appropriate.

Housing Associations

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of Housing Associations; (ii) the number of employees in each Association; and (iii) the number of properties owned by each Housing Association.
(AQW 19119/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The details requested are as follows -

(i) There are 30 Registered Housing Associations at present.

(ii) The Department does not hold information on the number of employees in each association.

(iii) The number of properties owned by each of the associations at 31 March 2012 is set out in the table below:-

Housing Association	Total Units
Abbeyfield	170
Alpha	961
Apex	3394
Ark	318
Broadway	84
Clanmil	2985
Connswater	612
Covenanter	42
Craigowen	323
Filor	402
Flax	450
Fold	4872
Gosford	200
Grove	209
Habinteg	2055
Harmony	472
Hearth	96
Helm	5162
Newington	418
Nico-Ownwership	N/A
Oaklee	4705
Open Door	413
Rural	416
SHAC	833
South Ulster	1004
St Matthews	187

Housing Association	Total Units
Triangle	544
Trinity	1948
Ulidia	1028
Wesley	144
Total	**34,447**

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Housing Associations

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the total number of properties built and acquired by each Housing Association in each of the last ten years; and (ii) the amount of public money spent on Housing Associations in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 19120/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to (i), the number of starts by each Housing Association in each of the last ten years is detailed in Table 1 below.

In relation to (ii), the amount of public money (Housing Association Grant and Disabled Adaptation Grant) spent on Housing Associations in each of the last ten years is detailed in Table 2 below. It should be noted that the amount spent in 2002/03 is not available.

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Table 1

Housing Association	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Abbeyfield	11	0	11	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Abode	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ark	23	15	0	4	7	0	4	26	26	3
Ballynafeigh	28	0	9	0	14	0	0	0	0	0
BCHA	4	5	3	40	49	42	47	10	25	0
Clanmil	52	196	35	321	53	116	124	283	325	145
Connswater	33	56	35	3	9	125	56	35	94	68
Corinthian	0	0	20	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Covenanter	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dungannon & Dist	4	0	10	5	0	49	0	77	0	0
Filor	9	0	0	23	2	1	0	1	22	0
Flax	11	61	29	11	40	25	18	0	43	3
Fold	176	272	226	261	96	98	163	427	106	332
Gosford	0	3	14	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Grove	41	18	0	10	0	3	3	11	12	0
Habinteg	46	24	97	88	88	120	78	79	16	10
Hearth	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	29	6	0
Helm	183	221	270	207	245	353	91	164	250	24
Newington	27	71	30	2	7	9	9	0	35	0
NIHE		35	5							
Oaklee	43	126	165	160	168	47	258	217	289	139

Housing Association	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Open Door	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0
Presbyterian	0	0	12	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rural	14	32	16	0	16	51	11	10	24	2
SHAC	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Ulster	1	38	23	12	7	89	56	52	82	66
St Matthews	3	2	4	15	3	2	9	1	2	0
Triangle	25	31	21	12	27	3	21	83	25	67
Trinity	20	48	35	80	52	33	76	124	63	38
Ulidia	0	89	117	65	19	135	11	13	206	30
Wesley	0	0	0	9	0	40	0	0	16	0
Total	**900**	**1526**	**1317**	**1519**	**1032**	**1595**	**1136**	**1838**	**2418**	**1410**

Table 2

Grant	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Housing Association Grant	69.1m	103.3m	119.6m	82.3m	172.2m	142.6m	155.3m	113.8m	87.3m
Disabled Adaptation Grant	2.9m	2.2m	2.5m	2.1m	2m	3m	2.7m	2.4m	1m
Total	**72m**	**105.5m**	**122.1m**	**84.4m**	**174m**	**145.6m**	**158m**	**116.2m**	**88.3m**

Social Housing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties have been transferred to the ownership of Housing Associations.
(AQW 19121/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's current stock transfer proposals were approved by the Board of the Housing Executive in September 2010. To date 232 properties have been transferred to Housing Associations to allow the necessary improvement works to be carried out, or to allow the relevant area regeneration strategy to be implemented and completed as planned.

Shantallow Community Benefits Office, Derry

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to close the Shantallow Community Benefits Office, Derry; and what criteria were used to make any decision.
(AQW 19122/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In addition to its regional network of 35 Jobs and Benefit Offices/Social Security Offices, the Social Security Agency also has three Community Benefit Offices located in Ballyclare, Crossmaglen and Londonderry. The Community Benefit Offices currently provide only a limited range of services which often require the claimant to subsequently attend a local Jobs and Benefits Office. In line with the Agency's commitment to deliver a modernised Welfare System to all customers, a review of these offices is currently underway. The outcome of the review is expected to be known shortly which will then be communicated to relevant stakeholders and staff.

The review has taken into consideration:

- The Agency's strategic direction in delivering a Reformed and Modernised Welfare System;
- The introduction of enhanced services through Customer First
- The Departments Accommodation Strategy;
- Health and Safety requirements for staff and claimants;
- Compliance with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and
- Known constraints within the current service provided in the Community Benefit Offices

The outcome of the review will be known shortly

Social Housing: Break-ins

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development whether Housing Executive District Officers have met with local PSNI Community Officers to ascertain the number of break-ins and burglaries in housing stock where the point of entry has been through panelled external doors.
(AQW 19124/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has not met with local PSNI Community Officers specifically to ascertain the number of break-ins and burglaries in its housing stock where the point of entry has been through paneled external doors. However, the Housing Executive has advised that it works in partnership with the PSNI and various agencies from both the voluntary and public sector across their network of District offices to deal with community safety issues and concerns about anti social behaviour. These partnerships include the implementation of initiatives to prevent and tackle community safety problems.

Social Housing: Break-ins

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive would consider surveying the external doors of tenants' properties to ensure that they meet a rigorous standard, in an effort to reduce burglaries and break-ins.
(AQW 19126/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that they have no plans to survey external doors. All new door sets that the Housing Executive has installed in their properties, through their planned and response maintenance programmes are to a standard which includes a Police "Secured by Design" licence. These doors are replaced on a condition basis or as part of the Housing Executive's fire door replacement programme which is mainly associated with their flats and maisonette stock.

DSD: G8 Summit

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development what additional resources his Department will receive to cover any additional costs from the G8 summit taking place in Fermanagh in June 2013 and from where the resources will be allocated.
(AQW 19149/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The G8 Summit in Fermanagh presents a unique opportunity to show-case the local area, region and Northern Ireland as a whole to the world and to world leaders. It is therefore very important that the area is presented in the best possible light. Indeed a "Town Centre Revitalisation scheme" amounting to £250,000 was approved for Enniskillen last December.

Indications are that Fermanagh District Council will be making further applications to my Department in relation to town centre improvements/regeneration ahead of the G8 Summit. These will be assessed against DSD's Regeneration objectives.

Public Procurement: Payment

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the advice his Department provides to sub-contractors who have not received retention monies from their main contractor twelve months after practical completion; and (ii) the procedures currently in place to make sure this does not happen.
(AQW 19176/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Within my department public procurement is principally undertaken and managed via a Centre of Procurement Expertise namely Central Procurement Directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel. Consequently we do not generally provide direct procurement advice to sub-contractors.

Social Housing

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) all new build social housing developments completed in the past 24 months; (ii) the name of each development; (iii) the name of main contractor; (iv) the date of practical completion; (v) the due date for release of full retention monies to each main contractor; (vi) the date of retention monies paid to each main contractor; and (vii) the reasons for withholding monies in cases where retention monies have not been paid.
(AQW 19181/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) the details requested are recorded in Tables 1 and 2 below. In relation to points (v), (vi) and (vii) the information is not available as Housing Associations release retentions to main contractors in accordance with the relevant conditions of construction contracts. Generally one half of the retention monies will be released in the payment made following Practical Completion. The remainder of the retention monies is released in the payment made following completion of the Maintenance Period, which normally has a twelve month duration from Practical Completion and is subject to the issue of the Making Good Defects Certificate. Therefore full retention release will not be paid until the contract administrator is satisfied that all defects have been satisfactorily remedied.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Table 1 - New Build Completions in 2010/11

Scheme Name	Units	Practial Completion Date	Main Contractor
Dove Gardens, Phase 1, Londonderry (Transfer)	63	17-Aug-10	McGurran Construction
Travellers Sites, Monagh Road, Phase 1, Belfast	16	16-Apr-10	Wilson & Mawhinney
Hillview Rd/Crumlin Rd, Belfast	75	11-Mar-10	T A Kernoghan Ltd
233 Whitewell Road, Belfast	12	18-Nov-09	Wilson & Mawhinney
Jamaica Street, Phase 2, Belfast (Transfer)	16	08-Jul-10	Dixons Contractors
Travellers Site, Monagh Road, Ph2, Belfast	5	16-Apr-10	Wilson & Mawhinney
Seymour Street, Lisburn	48	31-Jan-11	Sean Devine Construction
Connswater, Phase 3, Belfast (T)	88	31-Mar-10	TAL Ltd
36A-38 Park Avenue, Belfast (ALP)	20	05-Aug-10	TAL Ltd
Lime Kiln Lane, Cookstown	5	14-Mar-07	Sean McGlone Ltd
Ballybone, Oldpark, Belfast (Transfer)	15	24-May-10	M J McBride Construction
Eden Orlits, Phase 3A, Carrickfergus (Transfer)	12	14-Oct-10	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
Roden Street, Phase 2, Belfast (Transfer)	43	03-Mar-11	Braidwater Ltd
Enniskillen EMI, Phase 1	30	21-Sep-10	Kelly Bros.
Phase 4 Crossmaglen (T)	18	18-Nov-10	Kelly Bros.
Ivan Street, Belfast	10	25-Nov-10	M J McBride Construction
Church Street, Strabane	19	12-Jan-11	Loueme Construction
Old Warrenpoint Road, Newry	26	30-Sep-10	Kelly Bros.
98 Whitewell Road, Belfast	8	04-Aug-10	Andrew Bradley Ltd
St Patrick's PS, North Queen Street, Belfast (Transfer)	28	08-Dec-10	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
Mount Street/High Street, Bawnmore (T)	4	14-Dec-10	M J McBride Construction
1-3 Crawfordsburn Road, Bangor	21	30-Nov-10	McGurran Construction
3&5 Ashgrove Road, Newry	16	14-Oct-10	McParland Bros.
28-32 Belfast Road, Bangor & 18 Inglewood Park, Bangor	37	28-Apr-10	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
2A Brookhill Avenue, Belfast	11	12-Oct-10	Polly Bros.
51 Main Street, Crumlin	5	24-Jun-10	Martin & Hamilton Ltd
Gleneagles Gardens, Ballybeen (T)	12	29-Jun-10	Polly Bros.
Rathgill Zone 1, Bangor (Transfer)	28	06-Jul-10	Dixons Contractors
6-12 Breda Park, Newtownbreda	34	22-Nov-10	Geda Construction
Gibson's Lane, Bangor	17	14-Mar-11	TAL Ltd
PSNI Site, Newcastle Road, Castlewellan	6	24-Jan-11	Moss Construction Ltd
Shaftesbury Road, Bangor	34	26-Apr-10	MMM Design & Build
Highway, Highfield Estate, Belfast (T)	1	4-Oct-10	Eden Contractors Ltd
St Gall's Site, Phase 2, Belfast (Transfer)	8	29-Apr-10	Moss Construction Ltd
PSNI Site, Moy/Beechgrove,Dromore/Hillside Pk,Gilford	7	22-Jun-09	Brown Bros Ltd
2 Beechfield Street, Belfast	8	26-May-10	Carson Developments
Garryduff Gardens, Ballymena Road, Ballymoney	5	25-Mar-11	Henry Bros. (Magherafelt) Ltd
Church Street, Newtownards	20	16-Sep-10	J & K Campbell
70 Sunnyside Street, Belfast	12	21-Apr-10	TAL Ltd

Scheme Name	Units	Practial Completion Date	Main Contractor
Finaghy Road South, Belfast	12	25-Aug-10	J & K Campbell
Ladas Way, Belfast	16	07-Dec-10	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
38 Belfast Road, Comber	10	04-Aug-10	J & K Campbell
Stradreagh Challenging Behaviour Unit, Londonderry	18	21-Jun-10	QMAC Construction Ltd
21 Ashley Park, Dunmurry	8	28-Oct-10	O'Hanlon & Farrell
Ballymacoss Central, Phase 5, Lisburn	75	9-Dec-10	Brendan Loughran & Sons
Charter Youth Club, Sandy Row, Belfast (Transfer)	3	17-Nov-10	TAL Ltd
Total	**985**		

Table 2 – New Build Completions in 2011/12

Scheme Name	Units	Practical Completion Date	Main Contractor
Weir Court, Comber	15	30-Nov-11	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
PSNI Site, Rosemount, Derry (Transfer)	17	16-Jun-11	McGurran Construction
Iona House, Phase 1, Strabane	12	14-Jun-11	Lowry Bros. Ltd
42-45 Fergleen Park, Derry (T)	6	06-Oct-11	McGuigan Copnstruction
Apex Housing Rural Cottages Phase 8 (T)	4	12-Dec-11	Lowry Bros. Ltd
Site @ rear of Derrybeg Villas, Newry	2	11-Nov-11	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Martin's Lane, Newry	6	1-Feb-12	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Prospect Way, North Lurgan (T)	5	09-May-11	Desmond Magee & Sons
Darkfort Drive, Phase 1, Portballintrae (T)	6	21-Jan-11	Connolly & Fee Ltd
Garvaghy Crescent, Phase 1, Portglenone (T)	16	05-Jan-12	Brendan Loughran & Sons
43 Whitewell Road, Belfast	15	30-May-11	TAL Ltd
Crew Hill Gardens, Ardglass (ALP) (T)	26	23-Nov-11	Kelly Bros.
Glen Road, Travellers, Belfast	6	15-Sep-05	Sean McCourt & Sons
100 Cliftonville Road, Belfast (ALP)	9	06-Jul-11	QMAC Construction Ltd
Killough Road, Downpatrick (T)	19	03-Nov-11	Glasgiven/Geda Construction Ltd
North Rugby Club, Phase 3, Belfast	42	18-Jan-12	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
155 Glen Road, Belfast	15	13-Feb-12	Dixons Contractors Ltd
Springfarm, Phase 1, Antrim (T)	19	13-Sep-11	QMAC Construction Ltd
Templepatrick Library Site	2	19-Jan-12	M J McBride Ltd
31-35 Donaghadee Road, Newtownards	40	14-Dec-11	Sky Developments
100 Holywood Road, Belfast	16	22-Oct-11	TAL Ltd
Ladbrook Drive, Belfast	1	03-Feb-12	Hugh J O'Boyle
Prospect Park, Belfast	2	03-Feb-12	Hugh J O'Boyle
Tesco Site, Broadway, Donegall Road, Belfast, Phase 1	40	29-Mar-10	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
West Bank, Derry	124	22-Sep-11	Braidwater Ltd
Council Site, Dunsy Way, Comber (T)	33	07-Jul-11	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Finniston Primary School (Torrens 3A), North Belfast (Transfer)(ALP)	112	02-Jun-11	Braidwater Ltd

Scheme Name	Units	Practical Completion Date	Main Contractor
Alliance Avenue, Belfast (T)	4	16-Mar-12	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
31 The Brae, Ballygowan	14	22-Jun-11	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Drumaness Road, Drumaness (ALP)	12	06-Oct-11	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
McAuley Street, Phase 3, Belfast	14	30-Oct-09	Dixons Contractors Ltd
1 Doagh Road, Newtownabbey	13	21-Jun-11	Dixons Contractors Ltd
Boundary Way, Belfast	12	29-Jun-11	TAL Ltd
Newtowncloghogue (T)	22	16-Feb-12	Kelly Bros.
270-272 Falls Road, Belfast	10	10-Jun-11	Dixons Contractors Ltd
Carrick Hill/Library Street, Belfast (T)	11	18-Apr-11	Brendan Loughran & Sons
St Teresa's Site, Glen Road, Belfast	18	19-Aug-11	Geda Construction Ltd
Drumalla House, Carnlough	11	14-Apr-11	MSM Contractors
Carrowshee Park, Lisnaskea (T)	19	24-Oct-11	Donaghmore Construction
Gullion View, Meigh (T)	10	06-Sep-11	T & A Kernoghan Ltd
Loughrey Terrace, Drumquin (T)	2	01-Dec-11	Lowry Bros. Ltd
PSNI Station Melmount Road, Sion Mills	6	28-Mar-12	Lowry Bros. Ltd
Adrian Heights, Donagh	5	21-Feb-12	Lowry Bros. Ltd
Forthill Park, Newtownstewart (Transfer)	4	22-Feb-11	Dixons Contractors Ltd
Beechgrove, Dromore Phase 2 (T)	5	6-Dec-10	Kelly Bros.
Ennis Green, Lurgan (Transfer)	7	11-Apr-11	Kelly Bros.
Prince's Close/Street, Craigavon	4	19-Apr-11	Kelly Bros.
2A Cherryville Street, Belfast (T)	11	16-Feb-12	Dixons Contractors Ltd
Grove Street East, Belfast	17	20-Oct-11	J & K Campbell
Strand Avenue, Holywood (T)	19	31-Aug-11	TAL Ltd
Derrybeg Small Sites, Newry (T)	11	16-Nov-11	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Greenfield Park, Newry (T)	2	9-Sep-11	O'Hanlon & Farrell Ltd
Ardmore Drive, Hilltown (T)	8	15-Mar-12	TAL Ltd
Woodside Road, Loughbrickland (T)	24	28-Nov-11	Kelly Bros.
Total	**905**		

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration his Department has given to expanding the Warm Homes Scheme to include seals, insulation or draught exclusion measures for doors and windows as a means of improving heating efficiency in homes and reducing fuel poverty.
(AQW 19189/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current Warm Homes Scheme was tendered in 2009 with specific work content which did not include draft proofing measures. The Housing Executive, who manage the Warm Homes Scheme on behalf of the Department, cannot add additional works to the contract that were not included in the original tender documents. The Department will consider whether draught proofing measures should be a part of any future energy efficiency schemes.

Social Housing: Travellers Issues

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the proposed changes to the Housing Executive, where responsibility will lie for Travellers' issues within the new housing arrangements.
(AQW 19215/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is envisaged that responsibility for Travellers issues will lie with the Regional Housing Body under the proposed new structures for Social Housing Reform.

Universal Credit

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has had any conversations with Lord Freud about flexibility regarding the recipient of Universal Credit, in particular in relation to recommendation 5 of the Report on Welfare Reform by the Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements.
(AQW 19217/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I announced on 22 October 2012 that I had secured payment flexibilities for Northern Ireland following detailed negotiations with Lord Freud. Subsequently I tasked officials to develop and consult public representatives and voluntary sector representatives on a set of guidelines for determining the circumstances when the universal credit payment should be made on a twice-monthly basis or split between household partners. Officials are also considering the operational details of how direct payments to landlords will be organised.

This work is currently underway and an Oversight Board has been established, chaired by the Department's Permanent Secretary with input from a cross section of representatives from the community sector and academia. Two open forum events have taken place with members of the public and voluntary and community sector organisations to explore their views.

The Oversight Board is considering feedback from the discussion events alongside other research which will provide input to the Permanent Secretary's report. I expect to receive this report in April 2013.

Housing Associations

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has considered a comprehensive review of housing associations, to include accountability, financial governance, rent levels and engagement with tenants.
(AQW 19218/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The main tool by which the Department holds Registered Housing Associations to account is the Housing Association Guide. The Guide covers aspects around development, finance, procurement, governance and housing management including engagement with tenants. The Departmental Inspection Team carries out a rolling programme of inspections to determine each Housing Association's compliance with all aspects of the Housing Association Guide therefore all associations are regularly reviewed through the inspection process. The Inspection team was strengthened in 2011 by the appointment of additional Inspectors. The Monitoring team also collects and reviews the board minutes, relevant financial information on a quarterly basis and information concerning each Registered Housing Association's stock on a yearly basis via the Annual Regulatory Return.

There are no plans for a comprehensive review at present.

Atos Healthcare

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development whether Atos abides by, or follows guidelines, in relation to Employment and Support Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and approved by his Department, as well as the Disability Discrimination Act and Section 75 criteria, when dealing with persons being examined for work capability assessments or benefits adjustments and appeals.
(AQW 19232/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare provides medical support services under contract on behalf of the Department for Social Development. Atos Healthcare is required to deliver the Medical Support Services in accordance with the terms of the contract which also details applicable Social Security benefit regulations and all applicable case law, and current and future legislation. Atos Healthcare is required under the contract to comply with all applicable fair employment, equality of treatment and anti-discrimination legislation.

Negative Equity

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has reassessed the policy for vesting homes in negative equity, following the suggestion put forward by Lord Justice Sir Patrick Coghlin in the Lands Tribunal case that dealt with an owner-occupier who was left in such a predicament.
(AQW 19264/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In its judgement the Lands Tribunal acknowledged that government has recognised the need to support owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas as evidenced by my Department's policy on the matter.

The Tribunal has also suggested that because of the personal hardship revealed in the course of litigation, it might now be considered an appropriate time to review that aspect of the policy.

Prior to the judgement the Department had already been examining ways to assist owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas who find themselves in negative equity; possibly amending policy that would assist them to purchase an alternative home. However, any proposal to introduce such a policy requires detailed legal analysis and consultation with Ministers in the NI Executive; a task officials are currently undertaking.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his officials have had any discussions with their counterparts in the UK to discuss the possibility of exemptions for people living with a disability from the under occupancy penalty expected with the implementation of welfare reform.
(AQW 19271/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recognise that the under occupancy restriction is a serious issue for Northern Ireland and I recently had a very productive meeting with Lord Freud, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

My officials are working with the Housing Executive to develop a range of support measures to complement those outlined in my housing strategy, which aim to mitigate under occupancy for those affected, support households through the transition and ensure that everyone has access to affordable housing.

Generally there will be no exceptions to the application of the size limit rules for tenants with a disability, although there will be certain cases such as those in supported housing where the restriction will not apply. The size criteria will allow a disabled claimant or partner who needs a non-resident overnight carer an extra room. If there is another reason that an extra room is necessary, help may be available through the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme.

Some claimants affected by this measure may live in significantly adapted accommodation due to someone in the household having a disability. It will not always be practical or cost effective for these people to move to different accommodation or they may have no other option for making up a shortfall in rent. In such cases it may be appropriate to use Discretionary Housing Payments to make up the shortfall in their rent.

Universal Credit

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 11838/11-15, whether he will reconsider his answer given the evidence available from (i) the Women's Budget Group; (ii) academics Ruth Lister and Fran Bennett; (iii) the publication 'Northern Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge'; and (iii) the research conducted on behalf of Refuge on this issue.
(AQW 19280/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am working towards achieving a welfare system for Northern Ireland based on the principles of protecting the vulnerable, helping people into employment, developing a system that is fair, and encouraging personal and social responsibility.

In this context, and as indicated in my earlier response, I support the principle that, where possible, Universal Credit payments should mirror salary payments. Many of the claimants for Universal Credit will be in work and will be well used to managing their money on a monthly basis and/or the wages being paid to the main earner. Most claimants and their partners will be able to work with this proposed arrangement because they either have joint bank accounts or are financially capable of managing their household budget. However for those that may have difficulties, there will be the flexibility to opt for either a split payment or a twice-monthly payment.

I have tasked officials to develop and consult public representatives and voluntary sector representatives on a set of guidelines for determining the circumstances when the universal credit payment should be made on a twice-monthly basis or split between household partners. Officials are also considering the operational details of how direct payments to landlords will be organised.

This work is currently underway and an Oversight Board has been established, chaired by the Department's Permanent Secretary, with input from a cross section of representatives from the community sector and academia. Two open forum events have already taken place with members of the public and voluntary and community sector organisations to explore their views. The Social Development Committee is also being consulted and I have been keeping my colleagues on the Executive Sub Committee informed on developments.

The Oversight Board is considering feedback from the discussion events alongside other research including that which the member has referenced in his question and this will provide input to the Permanent Secretary's report. I expect to receive this report in April 2013.

Universal Credit

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of recommendation 5 in the Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements, Welfare Reform Bill, in light of the evidence which shows that payments of universal credit to the female head of the household can have a positive impact on child's wellbeing.
(AQW 19281/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Ad-Hoc Committee's recommendation was that the Department for Social Development should make payment of benefits to the parent with care of dependent children its default position in identifying a nominated claimant, in order to minimise any potential adverse impacts on women and children.

I accept that for some households, a split payment may better serve their needs and this was one of the key reasons why I negotiated flexibilities on the frequency of Universal Credit payments, split payments within households and direct payment of housing allowance to landlords. I have tasked officials to develop and consult public representatives and voluntary sector

representatives on the criteria for determining the circumstances when these types of universal credit payments should be made on a twice-monthly basis or split between household partners. Officials are also considering the operational details of how direct payments to landlords will be organised.

This work is currently underway and an Oversight Board has been established, chaired by the Department's Permanent Secretary with input from a cross section of representatives from the community sector and academia. Two open forum events have already taken place with members of the public and voluntary and community sector organisations to explore their views.

The Oversight Board is considering feedback from these events alongside other research and this will provide input to the Permanent Secretary's report. I expect to receive this report in April 2013.

Special Advisers: DSD

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19293/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Special Adviser has not made any declarations of interest. Records of any declarations of interest are placed on an individual's personal file by the Department's HR Division, to whom such declarations must be made in accordance with the conduct provisions in the NICS HR Handbook. Declarations of interest are not open to public inspection, with the exception of those made by members of DSD's Departmental Management Board which are published in the Department's Annual Resource Accounts.

Social Housing: Armagh City

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the availability of social housing in the east of Armagh City.
(AQW 19297/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Armagh City comprises the local housing areas of Armagh 1 and Armagh 2.

Armagh 2 covers the east of the city and includes the common landlord areas Alexander, Ardmore Drive, Ballinahone, Barrack Street, Barrack Hill, Gough Avenue, Beresford Court, Bridge Street, Folly, Lisanally Gardens, Lisanally Villas, Lonsdale Gardens, Orangefield and Victoria Park.

At September 2012, in Armagh 2, there were 48 applicants in housing stress. With an average of 32 allocations per annum from existing stock, there is therefore only a marginal residual need for new accommodation. This is being met through a new build scheme for 26 homes at Ardmore Road, which is currently on site.

Benefits Payments

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has saved in benefits payments due to emigration from North and East Antrim, in each of the last four years.
(AQW 19343/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as the Department does not hold information on benefit claimants who have emigrated.

Benefits Payments

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development how much his Department has saved in benefits payments in each of the last four years due to emigration, broken down by council area.
(AQW 19344/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available as the Department does not hold information on benefit claimants who have emigrated.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to seek finance from the UK Green Investment Bank to tackle fuel poverty.
(AQW 19371/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not have any current plans to seek finance from the UK Green Investment Bank to tackle fuel poverty. Officials from my Department have been working with colleagues from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to secure additional European funding for the Boiler Replacement Scheme.

Social Housing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the Housing Executive's £27 million underspend will have on housing provision in the incoming year; and to explain the reasons for the underspend.
(AQW 19387/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I do not know how the member has arrived at a figure of £27 million underspend within the Housing Executive's budget.

At the October 2012 Monitoring Round an easement of £8 million was declared against the Social Housing Development Programme resulting from efficiency savings and changes to the delivery model for the Bamford programme. This funding was reallocated to the Co-Ownership Housing Association budget and will fund approximately an additional 180 properties. This will help bolster effective demand by assisting deposit-constrained first time buyers and those returning to the market who are struggling to purchase a home and also help the wider economy.

As the Housing Executive is expecting to deliver the agreed new build starts target within the revised budget available, this will result in an overall gain across the social and affordable housing programme for 2012/13.

At the January Monitoring Round the Housing Executive declared an easement of £7 million revenue funding which was due largely to procurement efficiencies and has therefore not impacted on their programmes.

I have asked NIHE to ensure that it maximises its budget spend to support services to tenants and ensure any under spends are kept to a minimum.

With regard to "housing provision for the incoming year" the Housing Executive is finalising it proposals for its 2013/14 budget which will be carefully considered by its Board before submission to my Department. As the budget has not yet been finalised, it is not possible to comment further.

Social Housing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses were bought for use as social housing in each of the last three financial years, and in the current year to date.
(AQW 19390/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of properties that were bought for social housing in each of the last three years and in the current year to date.

Off the Shelf purchases are newly constructed properties bought from the open market. Existing Satisfactory Purchases are pre-owned dwellings purchased from the open market.

	Off the Shelf Purchases	Existing Satisfactory Purchases	Total
2009/10	467	76	**543**
2010/11	400	93	**493**
2011/12	275	109	**384**
2012/13	4	58	**62**

Housing: New Builds

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new builds that have been classed as starts in each of the last three financial years; and how many of these are (i) paper starts; (ii) peg in the ground starts; and (iii) near completion.
(AQW 19393/11-15)

Mr McCausland: New build starts make up the majority of starts in the social housing programme. Other categories which make up annual starts totals include purchases of both new and pre-owned properties from the open market.

As requested, the table below details only the new build starts element for each of the last three financial years. The table also shows how many of those starts have already completed and the year in which the remainder are due to complete.

Year	New Build Units	Already Complete	Due to complete 2012/13	Due to complete 2013/14	Due to complete 2014/15
2009/10	1,243	948	214	47	34
2010/11	1,752	812	480	460	0
2011/12	984	41	195	723	25

All new build starts are counted as starts when a contractor has entered into a contract, has taken formal possession of the site and the contract period has commenced. At that point, all houses within the contract are deemed to have started.

Housing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the proposed 8000 houses to be completed as part of the Programme for Government proposals, including social new build or those being built or bought by co-ownership.
(AQW 19395/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The breakdown of the 8,000 new homes to be delivered over the four year Programme for Government period 2011/12 to 2014/15 equates to approximately 6,000 social and 2,000 affordable homes. However, given the affordable side of the equation is demand led there is a need to be flexible around the eventual make up of the final 8,000 outturn figure.

Housing Benefit

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people in the North Belfast constituency in receipt of Housing Benefit, broken down by (i) community background; and (ii) housing sector.
(AQW 19410/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency and do not hold data on the community background of Housing Benefit claimants.

With regard to housing tenure, the Housing Executive has advised that, for their North Belfast, Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2 District Office areas, there are a total of 18,078 Housing Benefit recipients, broken down as follows:-

- 8,013 Housing Executive tenants
- 3,562 Housing Association tenants
- 6,503 Private Sector tenants

Cold Weather Payments

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has instigated the mechanism for cold weather payments due to the recent cold snap.
(AQW 19414/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The cold weather payments are automatically triggered in Northern Ireland when the average temperature is, or forecast to be, zero degrees centigrade or below for 7 consecutive days from 1 November to 31 March. This information is supplied to the Social Security Agency by the Met Office based on recordings and forecasts at 7 separate weather stations located at Aldergrove, Castlederg, Glenanne, Katesbridge, Magilligan, Stormont and Thomastown, each of which cover a range of designated post code areas.

Gambling: Online Gaming Operators

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development what provisions will be made for online gaming operators in his Department's review of gambling.
(AQW 19415/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently discussing the issue of online (remote) gambling with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The European Commission is also carrying out work, aimed at ensuring compliance of national regulatory frameworks with EU law and enhancing administrative cooperation between Member States. The outcome of my discussions with the relevant Minister in GB and the outcome of the work by the European Commission will inform how online gambling, including its operators, will be regulated within Northern Ireland.

Community Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report by Queen's University Belfast on Community Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19450/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My officials attended the launch of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded report "Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland" and have on previous occasions met with the authors of this report.

The findings and conclusions from this research form an important part of the evidence base for a Northern Ireland policy framework for Community Asset Transfer and I would expect the report to inform the work of the cross-departmental steering group which I have established to develop policy proposals.

Social Housing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the locations of social housing purchased under co-ownership as a result of a Government grant, in each of the last three financial years and in this year to date.
(AQW 19465/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Co-Ownership Scheme is currently the Department's main mechanism for delivering affordable homes to first-time buyers who cannot do so without assistance; the homes supported through the Scheme are not social homes.

The number of homes purchased through the Scheme with the assistance of Housing Association Grant is outlined in the table below.

COUNCIL AREA	Properties purchased using Housing Association Grant 2012/13	Properties purchased using Housing Association Grant 2011/12	Properties purchased using Housing Association Grant 2010/11	Properties purchased using Housing Association Grant 2009/10
Derry City Council	36	8	12	13
Limavady Borough Council	12	8	8	6
Coleraine Borough Council	14	12	1	7
Ballymoney Borough Council	8	4	11	7
Moyle District Council	2	0	1	2
Larne Borough Council	11	7	2	0
Ballymena Borough Council	27	14	16	10
Magherafelt District Council	3	7	3	2
Cookstown District Council	7	7	8	4
Strabane District Council	4	0	3	5
Omagh District Council	0	2	2	2
Fermanagh District Council	1	0	3	4
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	17	11	8	4
Craigavon Borough Council	65	53	51	37
Armagh City and District Council	4	10	1	0
Newry and Mourne District Council	25	17	10	8
Banbridge District Council	15	14	6	11
Down District Council	21	18	12	1
Lisburn City Council	118	91	87	70
Antrim Borough Council	46	29	16	16
Newtownabbey Borough Council	64	61	34	35
Carrickfergus Borough Council	12	8	10	6
North Down Borough Council	68	30	30	27
Ards Borough Council	39	31	25	17
Castlereagh Borough Council	32	18	37	21
Belfast City Council	120	96	72	63
Total	**771**	**556**	**469**	**378**

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Universal Credit

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development who will administer the Universal Credit; and how the harmonisation of different functions, carried out by different agencies, involved in its implementation will be achieved.
(AQW 19485/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While the Department for Social Development is the lead department for the introduction of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, a multi faceted Universal Credit Programme Team has been established to implement the new credit.

The Programme Team have been tasked to design new processes which incorporate all key aspects of Universal Credit. All relevant impacted organisations including the Department for Employment and Learning, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive are involved in the Programme Team.

The Department is also working in partnership with key strategic partners in the voluntary and community sector and private sectors to deliver a service that meets the broad range of needs of Universal Credit claimants.

The Department for Social Development will be accountable for the Universal Credit service and the Department for Employment and Learning will be accountable for the employment aspects of the Universal Credit service.

DSD: Capital Spend

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's capital spend since May 2011, broken down by constituency area.
(AQW 19519/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available by constituency area. The Department's capital spend between May 2011 and December 2012, broken down by the Business Areas where capital spend was incurred is shown in the table below.

Business area	Capital Spend May 2011 – December 2012
Core Department	£30,259
Child Maintenance & Enforcement	£44,720
Social Security Agency	£1,726,012
Urban Group	£3,576,281
Total	**£5,377,272**

Independent Living Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development how he will maintain the Independent Living Fund after its closure in Great Britain by 2015.
(AQW 19553/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department for Work & Pensions announced the result of a UK-wide consultation on the future of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) before Christmas, confirming that the ILF will close in 2015 with funding being devolved to Local Authorities in England and to the Devolved Administrations. The announcement also made clear that it would be for the Assembly in Northern Ireland to decide how current ILF users would be supported from April 2015.

The Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety will be responsible for the support of current ILF users from April 2015.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in East Belfast are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance; and for his assessment of this figure.
(AQW 19589/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As at August 2012, the number of people in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in East Belfast was 9,080.

Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance is based on an assessment of how much help someone needs with personal care and/or mobility needs because of their disability. Their place of residence in Northern Ireland does not therefore confer entitlement to Disability Living Allowance.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Negative Equity

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his Department's policy review of support for owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas in relation to the issue of negative equity.
(AQW 19682/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In a recent judgement on this issue by the Lands Tribunal, it acknowledged that government has recognised the need to support owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas as evidenced by my Department's policy on the matter.

The Tribunal has also suggested that because of the personal hardship revealed in the course of litigation, it might now be considered an appropriate time to review that aspect of the policy.

Prior to the judgement the Department had already been examining ways to assist owner-occupiers in redevelopment areas who find themselves in negative equity; possibly amending policy that would assist them to purchase an alternative home. However, any proposal to introduce such a policy requires detailed legal analysis and consultation with Ministers in the NI Executive; a task officials are currently undertaking.

Social Housing: Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the savings that are projected by the use of casement windows instead of reversible windows in double glazing replacement work by the Housing Executive.
(AQO 3363/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I asked the Housing Executive to research the specifications used in double glazing as I was concerned that the Housing Executive's specification for the supply and fitting of double glazing did not offer best value for money and also that the specification for hinges and handles was much higher than the industry standards for domestic properties.

In relation to savings, the use of casement hinges as opposed to fully reversible hinges has resulted in an estimated savings of £15.1m and is made up of:

- savings of approximately £9.6m since there is less need for redecoration grants and a further,
- £5.5m savings as a result of the procurement process. This figure includes approximately £0.5m savings realised by using the casement type hinge which cost £13 to £15 per pair as opposed to the fully reversible hinge costing £20.

Small Charitable Donations Act 2012

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development when local charities will benefit from the Small Charities Donations Bill.
(AQO 3364/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 received Royal Assent at Westminster on 19 December 2012. As the NI Assembly approved the extension of its provisions to Northern Ireland through a Legislative Consent Motion, local charities such as sporting and faith based organisations will be able to benefit from the new Gift Aid Small Donation Scheme and submit claims from 6 April 2013.

Starting this week, HMRC will be writing to all charities on their records to ensure they are aware of the new scheme and know where to find advice and guidance on how to avail of it.

Social Housing: Double Glazing

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the double glazing schemes that will be funded by his Department in Housing Executive properties in Limavady during 2013.
(AQO 3365/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has two double glazing schemes for 266 properties programmed for the Limavady area in the 2013/14 financial year. These schemes are as follows:

- 154 properties at Kennaught/Roe Mill at an estimated cost of £346,000 and
- 112 properties at Greysteel at an estimated cost of £252,000

This means that all Housing Executive properties in the Limavady area will, on completion of these two schemes, be fully double glazed.

Welfare Reform

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the zero earnings proposal contained in the Welfare Reform Bill as an incentive for people to work.
(AQO 3366/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I share the concerns about the Coalition Government's Welfare Reform proposals. I shall deal with the facts relating to the issue of zero earnings. The facts are that the Welfare Reform Bill does not contain any proposal for zero earnings. However, clause 11 enables Regulations to be made setting out the circumstances in which housing costs, including support for mortgage interest, may be paid.

The Coalition Government announced in the Autumn Statement on 5 December 2012 that under Universal Credit, an owner occupier who has any earned income during the assessment period will not be eligible for support with mortgage interest. We have not yet conducted any assessment of the impact of this decision.

The zero earnings rule should not be looked at in isolation. It needs to be considered in the round, taking account of the more generous disregards that will apply in Universal Credit.

Unless they are doing an extremely small number of hours at a low rate of pay, part-time workers will usually be better off in work than under the current system.

Welfare Reform

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has received any indication from the Department of Work and Pensions of the financial penalty caused by the delay in the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill.
(AQO 3367/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This year just over £5 billion of social security benefits will be met directly from HM Treasury outside of the NI Block DEL. HM Treasury will bear the direct risk of any increase which can be significant for example a one percent increase in social security spending is £50million.

This important funding arrangement is predicated on Northern Ireland maintaining the same social security policy as the rest of the United Kingdom.

I have not received any indication from the Department for Work and Pensions of any financial penalty caused by the delay in the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill. The Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith has written to me on the financial implications under the Statement of Funding policy highlighting that the UK government reserves its position with regard to any increased costs to the Exchequer caused by the delay in the progression of the Bill and will review this when the Welfare Reform Bill has completed its passage through the Assembly.

Housing Association Purchase Scheme

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development whether the new Housing Association purchase scheme aimed at restoring vacant or repossessed homes will be used to provide new social housing or solely for homes to be sold on the private market.
(AQO 3368/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The homes that will be made available, this first year, through the £11.8 million additional funding to Housing Associations, followed by £7.2 million next year, secured as a result of the Get Britain Building funding from HM Treasury will be affordable homes for sale targeted at first-time buyers and those returning to the market, giving them an all important step onto the housing ladder and helping to promote economic growth, assisting the construction industry to create and maintain jobs during a period when the construction of private sector housing is in decline.

Queen's Parade Project, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Queens Parade project, Bangor.
(AQO 3369/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I refer the Member to my response to Assembly Written Question AQW 19022/11-15.

Housing: Shared Neighbourhoods

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to promote mixed housing and shared neighbourhoods.
(AQO 3370/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As outlined in my draft Housing Strategy "Facing the Future", my Department will:

- build on the success of the pilot Shared Neighbourhood Programme by developing a Shared Community Programme;
- work with the Housing Executive to pilot a Belfast City Centre social housing waiting list to support and protect the city centre as a shared space;
- work with the Housing Executive to amend social housing application forms to ask applicants if they are prepared to live in a shared housing area; and
- work with the Department of Justice, the Housing Executive and Housing Associations to support local communities who wish to remodel or remove peace walls and other interface structures.

Housing: Neighbourhood Regeneration

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the housing led regeneration pilots.
(AQO 3371/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing led regeneration is one of the key themes in my new Housing Strategy. Proposals are to initially test this approach in four pilot areas. Officials are currently working up a formula for selection of the areas and I expect to be in a position to make an announcement before the end of the financial year.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the uptake of the boiler replacement scheme in South Antrim.
(AQO 3372/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate information by Parliamentary constituency. The South Antrim constituency is largely compromised of Antrim and Newtownabbey District Council areas. The current update on the Boiler Replacement Scheme in the South Antrim area is as follows:

- 1,100 application forms have been issued;
- 566 of these applications have been returned to the Housing Executive's North East Area Grants Office;
- 509 boiler installation forms have been issued to these applicants;
- 264 boiler installation forms have been completed and returned;
- 247 approvals to commence with Boiler Replacement have been issued to applicants;
- 88 replacement boilers have been installed; and
- 56 payments have been made.

Housing Executive: Waterloo Place, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how the renovation work in and around the Housing Executive's office at Waterloo Place, Derry has impacted on staff, service delivery and customers.
(AQW 19775/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that major refurbishment work is currently being undertaken in the building where their Waterloo Place District Office is located. Unfortunately the disruption has been more severe than originally anticipated. Therefore, it was decided to move the office on a temporary basis to another Housing Executive building at Richmond Chambers. This building is accessible to the public and is located within a short distance from Waterloo Place. Customers may either call at that office or contact staff through the normal telephone number.

The Housing Executive has apologised to their customers for any inconvenience caused and they will keep the public advised of any future changes to the office opening arrangements.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Northern Ireland Assembly: Stamped Envelopes

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission whether changes will be made to the stamped envelopes available to Members to enable them to be used for cross border post.
(AQW 19245/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Northern Ireland Assembly currently provides Members with 1st & 2nd class pre-paid envelopes (Guidance on the use of the pre-paids is available page 49 of the Member's handbook).

The contract to supply the Assembly with pre-paid envelopes was recently retendered and subsequently awarded (02/11/2012) to Royal Mail. This is a single tender contract as Royal Mail is the sole provider available and unfortunately it is unable to provide EU/overseas post-paid franking service.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 22 February 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Ilex

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 13877/11-15, to detail the criteria used to determine eligibility for the position of Chairman of Ilex URC; and who decided that the two candidates, who were initially deemed appointable, were unsuitable for the role.
(AQW 16306/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): In the competition to appoint a Chair for the Board of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company, all candidates had to demonstrate the following eligibility criteria:

(i) Experience at Board level demonstrating strategic leadership and effectiveness over a significant period.

(ii) Experience of effective dynamic leadership, including developing, implementing and monitoring corporate business strategies.

(iii) Experience at a senior level of effective corporate governance.

(iv) Experience in applying interpersonal, influencing and networking skills to build commitment and consensus within a wide constituency of business community and political stakeholders and to deliver agreed outcomes.

(v) Experience relevant to the discharge of the functions of a company including evidence of public sector investment leverage.

(vi) Understanding of the potential contribution of Ilex in implementing the vision set out for the integrated regeneration of the Derry City Council area, including the effective development of the Ebrington and Fort George sites.

Following the interview process, two candidates were deemed by the interview panel to have met the criteria listed above and were put forward for consideration by us for appointment. We decided that this competition failed to provide a sufficiently wide range of candidates for us to select from and it was agreed to run a further competition for the position of Chair. The two candidates from the earlier competition are still eligible for consideration and their names will be included with any additional names from the competition which will be run before the end of the financial year.

Creative Digital Industries Hub

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Creative Industries Hub will be in place at Ebrington by March 2013.
(AQW 17802/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Work is underway to convert former military accommodation, buildings 80/81, to house the Creative Digital Industries Hub on the Ebrington site. In advance of housing the Creative Digital Industries Hub, these buildings will be used to host the internationally renowned Turner Prize as part of the 2013 UK City of Culture programme. The 2013 Turner Prize will be in place from October 2013 until January 2014.

Questions for Written Answer: AQW 16306/11-15

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why AQW 16306/11-15 remains unanswered.
(AQW 18046/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQW 16306/11-15 was issued on 20 February 2013.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Ms McGahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Sexual Orientation strategy.
(AQO 3114/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We remain committed to publishing a Sexual Orientation Strategy. A draft consultation document to inform public consultation on the Strategy is currently under consideration within the Department.

Questions for Written Answer: AQW 16779/11-15

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the reasons for the delay in answering AQW 16779/11-15.
(AQO 3118/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to our answer to AQW 16779/11-15 which issued on 9 January 2013.

OFMDFM: Freedom of Information Requests

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they are taking in response to the Information Commissioner's findings on their Department's delay in responding to Freedom of Information requests.
(AQO 3119/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Officials have recently reviewed current practices for tracking and monitoring the processing of FOI requests, and new guidance has been issued to staff that will assist them in improving effectiveness.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish the business plan for the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze prison site.
(AQW 19040/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Business cases are internal process documents which are neither intended for nor designed for public or external release or publications.

Business cases are not routinely published and we are of the opinion that there is no rationale for releasing this document.

Community Relations

Mr McMullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the community relations projects that they have funded over the past year, including the total amount paid to each project.
(AQO 3229/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM funding for community relations work has increased by 18% over the last four years to just over £10m per year. This level of funding reflects our commitment to work towards our vision of a shared and united community.

OFMDFM currently supports community relations activity through a number of programmes. In this financial year to date, over £10m has been allocated to community relations projects as follows:

- £594k to the Contested Spaces Programme which focuses on early years and parenting, shared education, youth engagement and shared neighbourhood activities;
- £536k to the Summer Interventions Fund which supports diversionary activities for young people within communities during periods of heightened tension;
- £3.3m to the District Council Good Relations Programme to cover a broad range of good relations activity;
- £472K to Central Good Relations to support projects such as Youth Leadership and Programmes for disengaged young people;
- £770k to the North Belfast Strategic Good Relations Programme which focuses on citizenship, leadership and good relations.
- £4.36m to the Community Relations Council to administer a range of funding programmes on behalf of the department.

Executive

Mr Dunne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action is being taken to improve communications and increase public ownership of the workings of the Executive.
(AQO 3232/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are continually looking at ways to improve public awareness and understanding of the Executive's achievements through the use of a range of media channels.

As well as the use of traditional media, such as media releases, advertising and the branding of major capital projects, it is encouraging to note that the number of visits to the NIDirect website – which explains the range of Government services to the citizen – continues to grow.

Since April of last year, there have been in excess of six million visits to this website and the content is regularly updated.

The number of followers on the Executive's Twitter account continues to grow and many Departmental announcements are also published through our social media channels.

Ebrington Square, Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the status of Ebrington Square, Londonderry in terms of flags being displayed at events; and whether they will seek discussions with the City Council and the Department for Regional Development to ensure that whatever status applies to Ebrington also applies to Guildhall Square.
(AQW 19053/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is working closely with Ilex on the development of Ebrington. Events at Ebrington Square are currently governed by the Ilex Policy for Third Party Events at Ebrington (incorporating the Peace Bridge). This is an Ilex policy and not an OFMDFM one.

Events at Guildhall Square are governed through a permit system operated by Derry City Council and are outside the remit of our Department.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what impact the Welfare Reform Bill will have on their Department's (i) Child poverty; and (ii) fuel poverty policies.
(AQW 19118/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Act became law on 8 March 2012. The Minister for Social Development brought forward proposals for a Welfare Reform Bill to give effect locally to the proposed changes.

Given that the proposed legislation is still under consideration by the Assembly, it is too early to assess the potential impact on families and children here. We are aware that some have concerns. We will, of course, continue to monitor all the data in respect of poverty and its related issues.

OFMDFM: Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether any of the Special Advisers within their Department have made declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19249/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No Special Advisers within OFMDFM have made declarations of interest.

Single Identity Groups

Mr I McCrea asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what funding opportunities are available from their Department for single identity groups.
(AQW 19283/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In relation to Community Relations funding, a project/activity will not be funded if the aims of the project or activity are to promote any one religious or political viewpoint solely to one community or constituency.

With regard to all other forms of funding, single identity groups can apply but the religious identity of the group is not a determining factor in the funding allocation decision.

North-west: Investment

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much their Department has invested in the North West since May 2011.
(AQW 19360/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since May 2011 we have committed £13.84m capital and £3.8m resource to Ilex for the regeneration of the site and buildings at Ebrington Square.

We have spent £886,000 on maintenance and for some development work at the Shackleton site in Ballykelly which will enable it to be used for a number of community and commercial events.

We also provided funding of £4.27m towards equality, good relations and ethnic minority programmes in the North West.

North Belfast: Victims and Survivors

Mr Humphrey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the grant aid awarded by their Department to groups working with victims and survivors in North Belfast, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19365/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is not possible to identify funding which has been allocated to groups which provide services solely to victims and survivors resident in North Belfast.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the delivering Social Change Framework is focusing on signature projects and additional actions, whether Junior Ministers are responsible for delivering on the key priorities within the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People.
(AQW 19433/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Children and Young People's Strategy is being taken forward under the Delivering Social Change Framework.

To this end, the Children and Young Persons Early Action Paper, published in December 2012, takes full account of the principles of the Ten Year Strategy and the six high level outcomes. It identifies the key priorities for children and families to focus efforts and resources on a joined up approach to tackling poverty and improving the lives and experiences of our children and young people.

Actions arising from the Early Actions Paper are assigned to a lead department which is responsible for overseeing delivery as well as evaluating effectiveness. The delivery of the six Signature Programmes, which we announced on 10 October 2012 and which included proposed work around Family Support Hubs, Children's Nurture Units and Parenting Support Programmes, is the first tangible outworking of this approach.

Further actions will be identified taking account of the Early Actions Paper and the detail of the Children and Young People's Ten Year Strategy. The format in which these will be presented is under consideration.

Therefore, while the Junior Ministers have oversight of the Delivering Social Change Framework, much of the delivery on the key priorities of the Ten Year Strategy under the framework is the responsibility of a number of other departments and their respective Ministers.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact that the Peace and Reconciliation centre at the Maze may have on long established centres like Corrymeela.
(AQW 19463/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre will make facilities and central resources available to help develop the knowledge, learning and practice of local and international organisations working in this important sector.

The Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre will create synergies and co-ordinate, complement and add value to the objectives of many local peace building organisations.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement with local groups will help develop the work of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre when it becomes operational in 2015.

Delivering Social Change Programme: Ministerial Sub-Committees

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many times the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People has met in the last 12 months; (ii) how many times the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion has met in the last 12 months; (iii) who sits on both committees; and (iv) how many times the two committees have met on a joint basis within the last 12 months.
(AQW 19497/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion and Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People are leading the Executive's Delivering Social Change programme.

Under the Delivering Social Change structure, both Ministerial Sub-Committees meet quarterly on alternate rotation, co-chaired by OFMDFM Junior Ministers. Once a year we co-chair a joint meeting of the two Sub-Committees. Membership of the two Sub-Committees comprises all Executive Ministers.

To date, two meetings of the Delivering Social Change Sub-Committee on Children and Young People have taken place within the last twelve months and one Delivering Social Change Ministerial Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion has taken place.

The first joint meeting of the two Delivering Social Change Sub-Committees is scheduled to take place in April this year.

Racial Equality Strategy

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Racial Equality Strategy will be finalised, published for consultation and launched.
(AQW 19498/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are fully committed to tackling racial inequalities and promoting good race relations.

The Racial Equality Strategy is key to achieving these twin aims and officials have been working with minority ethnic representatives through the Racial Equality Panel to draft a new strategy that will meet the needs and aspirations of minority ethnic people and wider society.

We want to make sure that the document is fit for purpose and partnership working with representatives of minority ethnic people on the drafting of the Strategy will continue to ensure we achieve this aim.

We envisage that a 12-week public consultation will begin in spring this year.

The Strategy will be launched after this process has been completed and the consultation responses have been considered.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Poverty and Ethnicity Review

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they last met the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; and to outline what they expect to learn from its recent report on poverty and ethnicity.
(AQW 19499/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We sponsored the launch of "Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland: an evidence review" in Parliament Buildings on 4 February 2013.

The Poverty and Ethnicity review, together with other research, will form the evidence base for the forthcoming Racial Equality Strategy and ensuing actions.

The Department has contacts with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on various issues of mutual interest including racial equality, poverty and Delivering Social Change. A departmental official sat on the Advisory Group for the Poverty and Ethnicity review. We hope to continue this collaboration with the Foundation.

Racial Equality Strategy

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Race Strategy will be integrated with the Executive's strategies on the economy, investment, poverty, disability, children's, women's and rural development issues; and whether they have had any recent discussions with the respective Ministers.
(AQW 19522/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The new Racial Equality Strategy will address the complexity of identities, given that an individual's identity may be made up of several factors.

There will be clear linkages between implementation of the new Racial Equality Strategy and other anti-discrimination policies and strategies.

The Strategy will provide a framework for the mainstreaming of racial equality and good race relations in the implementation of all other relevant strategies.

The Racial Equality Strategy will be an Executive strategy and will therefore be discussed by the Executive in due course.

Northern Ireland Memorial Fund

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current status of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund; and how funding is allocated.
(AQW 19576/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund (NIMF) will remain in operation until the end of March 2013 at which stage the staff and funding responsibility will transfer to the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS).

Although the Fund closed for applications on 7 January 2013, recipients can continue to claim from their Letter of Offer up to 31 March 2013.

From April 2013 the VSS will take on the role of providing practical help and support to individual victims and survivors. To ensure continuity of service the VSS will contact all past recipients of the NIMF directly before 31 March 2013.

The NIMF is responsible for the assessment of applications and the decision to award funding to individuals through its grant schemes. We have no role in these operational decisions.

Economy and Jobs Initiative: Energy Efficiency Measures

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on the introduction of energy efficiency measures, as set out in the Economy and Jobs Initiative, including the mechanisms for delivery.
(AQW 19593/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Officials from our Department are currently working with colleagues from the Department for Social Development and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to refine delivery and

operational proposals, with a view to moving to early implementation of additional activity to supplement the Executive's existing retrofitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

Minority Ethnic Development Fund

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the next round of the Ethnic Minority Development Fund; and whether they can give an assurance that successful applicants will be notified before 31 March 2013.
(AQW 19595/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Minority Ethnic Development Fund remains a key element of our work to promote racial equality and good race relations.

Our officials have consulted representatives of the minority ethnic sector in order to produce a revised funding scheme that takes full account of a recent evaluation of the Fund and that reflects our objectives for the Fund, the needs within the sector and the need for good governance.

The Fund will run from the beginning of the new financial year for two years.

Adverts inviting applications are scheduled to appear in the press on 20 February 2013 and it is our intention that successful applicants will be notified before 31 March 2013.

Delivering Social Change Fund

Miss M McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Delivering Social Change Fund.
(AQW 19679/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A consolidated and integrated Delivering Social Change Fund has been established which subsumes the Social Protection Fund and takes forward Childcare, the Social Investment Fund and both current and future Signature Programmes under the Delivering Social Change delivery framework.

This Fund affords us the opportunity to respond quickly, and in a flexible manner, to urgent social needs as they arise and address the specific needs of some of our most in need individuals and families.

The initial allocation of £26 million made in October 2012 to the six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes demonstrated the benefit of deploying Executive resources flexibly across departments.

Children and Young People's Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the Early Actions Paper supersedes the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People Action Plans; (ii) when a further action plan for the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People will be developed, given that the last action plan ended in 2011; and (iii) how does the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People relate to the Delivering Social Change agenda.
(AQW 19685/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Children and Young People's Strategy is being taken forward under the Delivering Social Change Framework.

The Delivering Social Change Framework allows us to move away from previous lengthy and disjointed action plans and enables us to identify the most pressing issues and co-ordinate and focus action to maximise impact.

The Children and Young Persons Early Action Paper identifies the key priorities for children and families and focuses efforts and resources on a joined up approach to tackling poverty and improving the lives and experiences of our children and young people.

Actions arising from the Early Actions Paper will be assigned to a lead department which will be responsible for overseeing delivery as well as evaluating effectiveness.

The delivery of the six Signature Programmes, which we announced on 10 October 2012 and which included proposed work around Family Support Hubs, Children's Nurture Units and Parenting Support Programmes, is the first tangible outworking of this approach.

Further actions will be identified taking account of the Early Actions Paper and the detail of the Children and Young People's Ten Year Strategy. The format in which these will be presented is under consideration.

OFMDFM: Policy Area Updates

Mr McDevitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress made in each policy area since their joint announcement on 18 July 2012.
(AQO 3351/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In agreeing the policy decisions contained in the 18 July announcement, we gave a strong mandate for action across a range of significant strategic issues.

We are pleased to be able to inform you that this mandate has been built upon with continuing strong progress on these important issues.

The Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Board was established on 10 September 2012 and will take forward the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Kathryn Stone OBE was appointed to the post of Victim's Commissioner on 24 September 2012.

A competition to appoint a new Chair of ILEX was recently advertised, and applications closed on Friday, 8 February.

The Investment Strategy 2011-2021 was agreed at the Executive meeting held on 3 September 2012 and was published on 8 October 2012.

Work is ongoing on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and a Strategy will be published on completion of discussions between parties.

The Education Bill was introduced on 2 October and completed Second Stage on 15 October. The Bill is currently in Committee Stage, which is scheduled for completion on 8 April.

Legislation on welfare reform, incorporating important protections secured for vulnerable people here, is being progressed in the Assembly.

Social Investment Fund steering groups comprising voluntary/community and political representatives were established in October 2012 in each social investment zone. We have received draft strategic area plans for all areas. Finalised strategic area plans should be ready by 28 February 2013.

Work on changes to post-2015 structures of Government is being taken forward by the Executive Party Leaders Group. The Reports of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will contribute to this work.

Maze/Long Kesh Site: Road Infrastructure

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the plans in place to develop the road infrastructure at the Maze site now that the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society is moving to the development.
(AQO 3354/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Road infrastructure plans both on and around the site are currently being developed by the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation (MLK DC) as one part of an integrated transportation strategy for the site. The Corporation has as a high priority the development of improved linkages with the M1 to ensure that investment in essential road infrastructure facilitates the development of the overall Maze/Long Kesh site.

The MLK DC is working closely with the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) to help ensure the Agricultural Show in May is a success. The Corporation is providing a new site entrance and extensive on-site parking in advance of this year's Show, and will have utilities available on site for the RUAS. The RUAS are working closely with government agencies to ensure effective traffic management of the event which includes plans for the provision of traffic flow monitoring cameras.

First Minister and Deputy First Minister: Visit to Brussels

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their recent visit to Brussels in relation to Peace projects.
(AQO 3356/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We travelled to Brussels as negotiations to conclude an agreement on the EU budget for 2014-2020 entered a critical stage.

We used the opportunity to raise issues important to us at the highest levels within the European Union.

In Brussels, we met with the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz; the Commissioner for Research and Innovation, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn; and the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn. We also met with Professor Danuta Hübner MEP, chair of the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development, MEPs Martina Anderson, Diane Dodds and Jim Nicholson, as well as the respective Ambassadors of the UK and Irish Permanent Representations to the European Union.

While in Brussels we also took the opportunity to attend the launch of an exhibition as part of the Connected Health and Prosperity Event held in the European Parliament under the aegis of Diane Dodds MEP and was supported by the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

We were also keynote speakers, along with the Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin, TD at a conference hosted by Commissioner Hahn entitled "Bringing Divided Communities Together - Sharing the Experience of the EU PEACE programme". The centrepiece of the conference was a number of innovative project testimonies from the PEACE Programme giving a detailed insight into the work accomplished and the impact that this work continues to have on people's lives. The Conference also explored whether the PEACE approach is a model that could be used for other regions that are emerging from conflict.

Our visit was timely as the final preparations were being made for the European Council on the 7-8 February where subsequently agreement was reached on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

While it is too early to provide a comprehensive analysis of the total budget, we can confirm that a provision of €150m has been included for a further PEACE Programme.

This is not the end of the negotiations as the European Parliament must give its approval. However, it is a significant step towards a further PEACE programme and we will continue to work with our allies in the European Parliament to secure its final agreement.

This is a considerable achievement for our Executive, a clear confirmation of the importance of increased European Engagement by our Executive.

The Executive is committed to continuing this engagement over the coming months as the crucial pieces of sector-specific proposals that decide the detail of future European Funding are finalised.

Delivering Social Change Framework: Children and Young People

Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they are facilitating an early intervention approach on children and young people's issues across Executive Departments.
(AQO 3404/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: One of the key priorities of the Executive is to improve the life chances of our children and young people. We are committed to achieving this through the Delivering Social Change framework, which has placed an initial focus on the needs of children and their families to ensure the most urgent and significant problems in our society are addressed, and at the earliest opportunity.

The Delivering Social Change Framework is about creating a new culture and focus on cross-cutting work to achieve social benefits. In practical terms, this means focusing at a strategic level on early intervention both to tackle issues before they develop into problems and to give children a good start in life.

In support of this, on 10 October last year, we announced the allocation of £26 million of central funds for the delivery of six new signature programmes under the Delivering Social Change framework.

Significantly, these will improve numeracy and literacy levels, offer increased family support by way of additional family support hubs, nurture units and positive parenting programmes and assist those young people who are not currently in education, employed, or undertaking training.

These Signature Programmes complement the larger social and economic policies and programmes being carried out across departments to tackle poverty impacting on the lives of children and young people. They also deliver on the priorities identified in the Children and Young Persons Early Action Document and take full account of the principles of the ten year Children and Young People's Strategy, including its six high level outcomes identified for children and their families.

The Children and Young People's Strategy specially commits the Executive to 'promote a move to preventative and early intervention practice without taking attention away from our children and young people currently most in need of more targeted services'.

The Executive is determined to see delivery and is confident that the Delivering Social Change framework provides the streamlined governance and accountability necessary to see real change that we all want for our children and young people, and society as a whole.

Delivering Social Change Framework: Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the signature projects intended to improve numeracy and literacy.
(AQO 3412/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education is presently taking forward the Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme under the Delivering Social Change framework. The programme seeks to support improvements in the literacy and numeracy levels within our schools.

Eighty recently graduated teachers will be appointed to ensure extra support for children in primary schools to achieve the expected levels in Reading and Maths, and 150 recently graduated teachers will be appointed to provide additional support to pupils in post-primary schools who are not predicted to get at least a 'C' grade in GCSE English and/or Maths.

The Western Education and Library Board, which has been appointed as the lead board to help deliver the project, has set up a Strategic Oversight Group with responsibility for developing regional criteria for the recruitment of teachers and the identification of eligible schools. This work is currently underway.

It is intended that the additional teachers will be appointed prior to the beginning of the 2013/14 academic year.

Northern Ireland Executive Office in Brussels

Mr Humphrey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress and role of the Northern Ireland Executive Office in Brussels.
(AQO 3413/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The role of our Brussels office remains the same as when it was established in 2001 which is to serve as the focal point for liaison with the Institutions of the European Union in promoting the Executive's interests in areas of policy, legislation and funding.

The office aims:

- To assist the Executive further the aims of its Programme for Government through engagement with the European Institutions in Brussels.
- To assist departments contribute to EU policy development and implementation in relation to their core business and increase departmental engagement with elective European funding programmes.
- To maintain and increase contacts with the EU institutions and EU regional representations in Brussels, particularly using the leverage of the Barroso Taskforce.
- To facilitate contact with the EU institutions, Regional Offices and other relevant Brussels based organisations by our non-governmental and local government sectors.
- To raise the positive profile of the region in Brussels.

These were reaffirmed by the Executive when it approved the review of the European Division.

We officially opened new premises for our offices in December 2010 in the presence of European Commission President, José Manuel Barroso, as part of our commitment to improve the Executive's European engagement. These new premises have enabled our office to considerably increase the services it provides.

Since moving to new premises, up to the end of January 2013, 5,500 visitors have passed through our offices in Brussels, attending hundreds of policy seminars, meetings, cultural events and receptions. During this time, the office has facilitated 30 Ministerial programmes with Ministers increasingly attending the Council of the European Union. The office has also facilitated 8 visits by Assembly Committees and 4 by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust.

In September 2011, our Brussels office, in co-operation with the NI Arts Council, launched "The Brussels Platform". This cultural programme provides an opportunity to promote the diversity of cultural talent that we have to offer.

Other significant events held in our offices during this time include hosting seminars for Open Days, the European week of Regions organised by DG Regional Policy and the Committee of the Regions. In 2011, and again in 2012, the office hosted official Open Days seminars with over 120 attendees.

In February 2012, the office hosted an event to celebrate the awarding of the first Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) to Lough Neagh Eels. The reception which featured some of our best local food products served to showcase the highest quality of our agri-food industry.

More recently, the office facilitated a Gala Dinner for over 60 people, hosted by Minister Poots, as part of a Connected Health and Prosperity Event held in the European Parliament.

The number of people based in our Brussels office has increased to 13. There are currently 3 OFMDFM staff working in Brussels, and they, along with 3 locally recruited support staff, comprise the Brussels element of OFMDFM's European Division. One Department of Agriculture and Rural Development officer and 2 Invest NI staff are co-located with the OFMDFM team. The 4 Barroso Task Force Desk Officers are also based in the office.

The running costs of the office are borne by OFMDFM. DARD and Invest NI contribute towards the costs of the office space and support services from OFMDFM.

During our most recent visit to Brussels on 29-31 January, our offices hosted, in co-operation with the SEUPB, an exhibition of PEACE III projects and a reception to coincide with the PEACE conference organised by the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn. The timing of these events was significant as negotiations to conclude an agreement on the EU budget for 2014-2020 entered a critical stage.

The Multi-Annual Financial Framework recently agreed by European Heads of State included a provision for 150 million euros for a PEACE IV Programme. While this is not the end of the process as the European Parliament must give its approval, it is a significant step forward and a clear confirmation of the importance of increased European Engagement by our Executive.

We are committed to continuing this engagement over the coming months and beyond as the crucial pieces of sector-specific proposals that decide the detail of future European Funding are finalised, such as the Common Agriculture Policy, Research and Development funding and Structural Funds, including the PEACE Programme. Our Brussels office will continue to be at the forefront of this work.

Questions for Written Answer: AQW 17802/11-15, AQW 16306/11-15, AQW 18046/11-15

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why AQWs 17802/11-15, 16306/11-15 and 18046/11-15 remain unanswered.
(AQW 20073/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A response to AQWs 17802/11-15, 16306/11-15 and 18046/11-15 was issued on 20 February 2013.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Meat and Meat Products: Import Checks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to ensure that Northern Ireland is not used as a transit point for contaminated meat.
(AQW 18577/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Meat or meat products entering the EU through the Border Inspection Post in the north of Ireland from Third Countries are subjected to full import checks as required by EU Directive 97/78.

Checks will also be carried out by my officials at the ports of entry to the north of Ireland on meat or meat products originating from within the EU, if a consignment is the subject of a notification though the Rapid Alert System for Feed and Food of the Commission (RASSF) or an EU safeguard Decision imposed by an EU country.

I have asked the FSA to urgently begin an enhanced programme of inspections across the north of Ireland. This enhanced regime commenced on 5th February and will sit alongside a Britain and the north of Ireland-wide sampling survey in which the two selected local district councils are already participating.

The purpose of this enhanced programme is to establish the sources of incoming meat ingredients to each establishment and assure that consumers' interests are being protected in relation to the declaration of the meat species in the establishments' products, and the precautions adopted by manufacturers to reduce or eliminate unintended inclusion of low levels of species that are not declared.

Railways: Rail Halt at Ballykelly

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had, or plans to have, any meetings with the Minister for Regional Development regarding the provision of a Northern Ireland Railways halt at Ballykelly and the funding issues surrounding such a provision.
(AQW 18704/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Any decision on where railway halts should be sited, their funding and approvals, falls within the remit of the Department for Regional Development. I wrote to the DRD Minister on 16th October 2012 inviting him to give serious consideration to establishing a rail halt at Ballykelly. At present there is no financial provision for such a halt.

My officials are currently liaising with colleagues in DRD to consider the transport implications for relocating my Department to Ballykelly including the potential for a railway halt. When I receive the initial options from officials I intend to seek a meeting with Minister Kennedy to discuss the way forward including funding implications.

Rural Development Programme: Sports Clubs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total amount of Rural Development Programme funding allocated to sports clubs, other than football or GAA clubs, broken down by sport.
(AQW 18864/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Development Programme does not provide funding to sports clubs for direct sporting activities. However, where such an organisation wishes to promote a project that benefits the wider rural community and which is separate from their primary activity, this may be considered for funding.

Following open competition and robust assessment, funding has been awarded to clubs not associated with Soccer or GAA as follows:

Sailing - £75k to provide a stop off point on the North Coast canoeing trail.

Golf - £169k to provide better access to tourists visiting the area and provide additional community facilities.

In both cases these clubs were funded under measure 3.3 in support of actions to increase tourism in their respective local areas.

Farmers: Profit Margins

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she can take to increase profit margins for farmers.
(AQW 19308/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is important to start by recognising that there are a range of factors which farmers and governments simply cannot control, such as international commodity markets, exchange rates and the weather. These can have a major impact on profitability, as the 2012 farm incomes estimates have illustrated. Therefore, when it comes to increasing profit margins, the focus must be on those issues that fall within the control of individual farmers, such as technical efficiency, management skills or the adoption of new technologies. These considerations will influence, for example, the development of the next Rural Development Programme and the type of research commissioned by DARD under the Evidence and Innovation Strategy. They also influence current Departmental efforts.

My Department has a number of ongoing initiatives aimed at helping farmers improve their competitiveness and profitability. Under the competitiveness strand of the current Rural Development Programme, my Department has provided £45 million funding for a number of schemes, including:-

- Farm Family Options, which includes both skills training and business mentoring;
- the Focus Farm Programme, which looks at promoting best practice, modern technology and innovative farm methods;
- Benchmarking, which is an important tool in monitoring and improving input costs and livestock production efficiency as well as assessing overall performance;
- The Supply Chain Development Programme, which supports farmers working together and with others to improve the rewards from their supply chain; and,
- The Farm Modernisation Programme, which provides support for farmers to modernise their holdings and improve production techniques.

Going forward, we need to build an industry that is not only competitive, but also resilient in the face of market volatility and other income shocks. I am hoping that the work of the industry-led Agri-Food Strategy Board will help set a growth agenda and contribute to the building of an industry that is robust, outward looking, self-reliant and profitable.

In the meantime, I am very aware of the current cash-flow difficulties many farmers are facing and I have taken a number of steps to help alleviate these problems. Recently, I announced my intention to bring forward the payment of the 2013 LFACA Scheme some three weeks earlier than planned. I have also asked for payments under the Countryside Management Scheme to begin in May 2013, some four months earlier than they began last year. My decision not to apply a further year's voluntary modulation will also help alleviate some of the financial pressure on farmers. In addition, my officials are providing practical information and advice to farmers through a series of on-going workshops to help mitigate the on-going impact of last year's poor weather conditions during the growing season.

Aerial Systems

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18113/11-15, whether the unmanned aerial system will be utilised for additional purposes in 2013.
(AQW 19329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no current plans to deploy unmanned aerial systems in new areas of work in 2013.

Commons

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18113/11-15, to detail her Department's definition of Commons; and what areas of Northern Ireland are classified as Commons.
(AQW 19332/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The term "Commons" is generic and is used to refer to areas of mountain or uplands that are used (shared) by several farmers. There is no single definition of a "Common". My Department records over 300 areas covering in excess of 36,000 hectares as "Commons".

In some cases these "Commons" are managed by Trustees and were established under the 1903 Irish Land Act, others are managed by Trustees and were set up under various pieces of legislation. Some areas are owned by individuals where several famers have a right to graze the area and others are areas where there is no discernable ownership of the area and a number of farmers share the area by agreement.

Under the CAP Regulations my Department is required to notionally allocate an area used in common between individual farmers in proportion to their use or right of use of the area.

My Department provides notional areas to farmers who have shown they have a right to use or are using a "Common". The farmers use the allocated areas to support claims for subsidy.

In compliance with its obligations under EU law my Department must map such areas which are often large inaccessible areas that are difficult to map because of their remoteness and terrain.

The areas treated as “common land” by my Department are spread throughout the north and are mainly confined to mountains or upland areas. The majority of these areas can be found in Counties Antrim, Derry and Tyrone.

Rural Development Programme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to include measures exclusively aimed at women in the next Rural Development Programme.
(AQW 19376/11-15)

Mrs O’Neill: DARD’s initial proposals for the next Rural Development Programme are currently being considered by a Stakeholder Consultation Group, which includes the NI Rural Women’s Network. These initial proposals contain a range of measures which are open to women, either as farm business owners, landowners, rural entrepreneurs or members of a farm family.

I want to see a good uptake of these measures by rural women. The proposals for the next Rural Development Programme will go out for a full public consultation later in 2013 and I want to hear from rural women and our other stakeholders how we can better design our measures to encourage more applications from women, and increase their representation across the Programme generally.

In addition, an Equality Impact Assessment of the next Rural Development Programme will be carried out. This will look at the potential impact of the Programme on gender, as well as the other Section 75 groups. This consultation will take place at the same time as the consultation on the draft Programme, and will provide another opportunity for the public to have their say on the role of women within the next Rural Development Programme.

Women in Rural Areas: Job Opportunities

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures she has taken to increase job opportunities for women living in rural areas.
(AQW 19377/11-15)

Mrs O’Neill: The NI Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007–2013 is not primarily a job creation programme however it has strong economic focus and provides funding for business creation and farm diversification amongst other things. It is open to anyone living or working in a rural area irrespective of gender. Within the NIRDP women are a key target group both as direct and indirect beneficiaries of programme funding. Therefore while support for female entrepreneurs and job creation in general is crucial for a thriving and sustainable rural community, so also is the creation of the conditions that enable rural women to engage in and return to the world of work.

To date the Rural Development Programme has, despite the economic turn down, created 283 full time equivalent jobs available for both men and women. In addition 233 projects, undertaken by women applicants have been awarded £4.5m in grant aid. In recognition of the barrier that a lack of accessible childcare presents to woman in rural areas who wish to enter employment, the programme has supported 36 projects to aimed at developing both businesses and infrastructure for rural childcare provision.

Women have an important role to play in the delivery of Axis 3 of the NIRDP both as entrepreneurs and as members of Local Action Groups (LAGs). Therefore NIRDP’s Network has facilitated a Thematic Working on Women in Rural Development. The group with representation from LAGs, YFCU, NIRWN and CSL has been identifying and sharing good practice and has held encouragement conferences and show cased inspirational role models. It has also worked closely with QUB with their gender mainstreaming work.

Finally, I am delighted to say that within LAGs there are 65 female LAG members who will ensure that the views of women are represented in the funding assessment and decision making processes.

DARD: Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18188/11-15, when she requested Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland to conduct an independent inspection of the Central Investigation Service.
(AQW 19380/11-15)

Mrs O’Neill: In May 2010 my Department’s Permanent Secretary requested that the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) conduct an independent inspection of the Central Investigation Service. However, CJI were unable to do so and confirmed that DARD is not listed as one of the organisations that come under the CJI’s statutory remit to inspect.

I intend to meet with the Minister of Justice and the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in the near future to discuss whether CIS can be added to the list of organisations that the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice must inspect.

DARD: Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what qualifications are deemed essential to the post of Investigator in the Central Investigation Service.
(AQW 19381/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Investigators must have a BTEC Certificate in Advanced Professional Investigative Practice. This qualification is accredited by a recognised body.

DARD: Fraud Hotline

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of calls received by the Fraud Hotline in each of the last three years, broken down by month.
(AQW 19384/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In response to your question, I have provided, at Annex A, the detail of the number of calls received by the Fraud Hotline in each of the last three years plus the current year to date, broken down by month.

Annex A

Year	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2009/2010	1	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	6
2010/2011	0	0	7	0	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	13
2011/2012	3	1	3	1	5	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	17
2012/2013	2	0	0	4	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	-	11

DARD: Fraud Hotline

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the costs incurred by the Fraud Hotline in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19385/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Fraud Hotline cost the Department £227 per annum. This equates to £681 over the last three years.

Farm Accident Statistics

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department records farm accident statistics.
(AQW 19418/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not routinely collect farm accident statistics. However, a one-off Social Survey of Farmers and Farm Families published by DARD in 2002 found that non-fatal accidents requiring medical treatment had occurred on 3 per cent of the surveyed farms in the previous 12 months.

Rural Development Programme: North-east Region

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the projects that have been allocated funding in the North East Region Rural Development Programme cluster to date and the amount allocated to each.
(AQW 19425/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Axis 3 funding is delivered under a LEADER methodology through seven local council clusters. The methodology empowers local people to make local funding decisions to address local issues in line with an approved Local Development strategy.

The North East Region (NER) is one such cluster and below is a list of all projects in the North East Region that have been allocated funding. You will note that I have redacted the names of applications made by private individuals in line with their expectations of confidentiality and that all processing will take place in accord with the Data Protection Principles

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
	150 kw wind turbine	50,000.00
Moyle District Council	Bushmills Tourist Information Centre	250,000.00
Coleraine Riding for the Disabled Association	Coleraine Off-Road Trail Ride	174,780.00
	Green energy and environmental sustainability for Slemish Camping Barn project	50,000.00
	Metal Cutting Facility	50,000.00
Heritage Experience Ltd.	North East Heritage Experience	50,000.00
	The Range	50,000.00
GlenarmBuildings Preservation Trust	Technical Assistance Grant	5,000.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Tullymore Rural Amenities Group	A Walk in the Park	1,982.81
Tinsdale Wood Design	Acquisition of additional machinery	5,900.00
DA O'Rawe Dental Surgery	Additional Dental Surgery	25,000.00
Carnroe Supplies Ltd	Additional Equipment Expansion	31,000.00
	Agricultural Equipment Fabrication and Repairs	11,250.00
Antrim Glens Tourism	Antrim Glens Tourism Publications	6,525.00
Coleraine Borough Council on behalf of Articlave Community Development Group	Articlave Village Plan	5,250.00
Maine Surface Finishing	Automatic Shot Blasting Facilities	50,000.00
Bailey Waste	Bailey Waste	9,000.00
Moyle District Council	Ballintoy Village Plan	3,000.00
Ballybogey & District Community Association	Ballybogey Village Action Plan	5,250.00
Woodbine Skips Ltd.	Barrel Separation System	50,000.00
	Boarding Kennels - Upgrade	16,085.08
	boarding kennels and cattery, also grooming parlour	45,000.00
The Bushmills Trust	Brighter Bushmills	14,310.00
Moorings Mediquip	Buddy Roamer walker	22,500.00
	Burnquarter Rifle Range	5,000.00
Cromore Castles	Business Expansion & Progression	39,612.50
	Camping Barn at Aunt Rachels Cottages	2,000.00
Carnlough Community Association	Carnlough Village Action Plan	5,250.00
	CASTLEROCK CATTERY	30,271.20
Castlerock Community Association (CCA)	Castlerock Community Development Project	23,947.98
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	Causeway Coast and Glens, a landscape shaped by time	5,000.00
National Trust	Causeway Coastal Route Interpretation Project - Rathlin Island	4,250.00
National Trust	Causeway Coastal Route Interpretation Project - Cushendun Village	4,250.00
National Trust	Causeway Coastal Route Interpretation Project - Mussenden Temple	5,250.00
Giants Causeway Community Association	Causeway Townland Names	2,400.00
Cloughmills Community Action Team	Cloughmills C.A.T. Village Renewal Phase I	7,373.40
Cloughmills Community Association	Cloughmills Community Hall	35,701.50
	Cloyfin Wind Turbine	31,861.50
Colin Turtle Photography	Colin Turtle Photography	16,050.00
Islandmagee Community Development Association	Community Website Creation	4,915.35
Carnroe Supplies Limited	Computer Server Project	12,000.00
Ballymena Business Centre	Conference Audio Visual Equipment and Digital Display Unit	11,321.00
Larne Borough Council	Construction of a Covered BBQ and Event Area within Carnfunnock Country Park	67,500.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
	Cooldaragh Logs	16,070.00
Larne Borough Council	Creating A Clean, Green, Smart Tourist Environment	48,635.25
Larne Borough Council	Creating a Clean, Green, Smart Tourist Environment	45,198.75
Ballymena Borough Council	Creating a Cleaner Greener Tourist Environment	13,125.00
	Cromore Castles 2011	24,315.00
CT Sports Ltd	CT Sports Production Workshop	31,300.00
Cullybackey Residents Association	Cullybackey Village Action Plan	5,250.00
Cushendall District Development Group Ltd	Cushendall Development Group Application	11,190.00
Moyle District Council	Cushendall Village Improvement Scheme	51,720.00
Moyle District Council	Cushendun Village Plan	3,000.00
Ballymoney Borough Council	Dalriada Drives Feasibility Study	5,000.00
Antrim Estates Company	Dalriada Festival 2011	50,000.00
NER	Dalriada Links	5,000.00
Dervock & District Community Association	Dervock & District Village Action Plan	5,250.00
Dervock & District Community Association Limited	Dervock Streetscape Improvement Project	11,250.00
Acrodesign	Digital Print Machine	12,500.00
R.A. O' Neill Plant Hire LTD	Dredging projects	50,000.00
	Dressmaking & Alterations	1,350.00
	Dunaird Storage	50,000.00
Dunloy Development Partnership	Dunloy Village Plan	4,500.00
Agquip Ltd	Efficient Slurry Solutions	3,000.00
Agquip Ltd	Efficient Slurry Solutions	50,000.00
Ems Ltd	EMS Ltd Growth	33,500.00
Payescape	Enhance of IT infra-structure and Office environment	7,502.00
	Enhancing H&S on the Work Premises	15,424.34
Agquip Ltd	Equipment For Rapid Prototyping	36,975.00
Eventco (Caterers and Marquees)	Eventco Marquee Hire	31,687.50
D McV Wood Processors	Expanding Timber Processing Business	11,500.00
Loughbeg Garage Ltd	Expansion of Loughbeg Garage Ltd	50,000.00
	Expansion of Physiotherapy and Complementary Medicine Clinic.	2,579.63
moyle district council	Facilitation of Village Renewal and Development in the North east Rural Development Area	113,099.00
	Farm Energy Generation	30,900.00
Crow's nest Community Playgroup	Feasability study into building a community hall suitable as use for Playgroup and out of schools cl	4,627.67
Antrim Estates	Feasiblity study regarding installation off Mini Hydro electric	5,000.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
DFT(Diamonds Fixings & Tools) Ltd	Flaxmill extension & machinery	35,750.00
FMK Architecture Ltd	FMK Office Expansion	5,280.10
Coleraine Borough Council	Food Tourism Scoping	5,000.00
	Foriff Caravan Site (Improvements)	7,625.00
Ardclinis Outdoor Adventure	Garron Point Outdoor Education	26,250.00
Garvagh Museum Ltd	Garvagh Museum Ltd - Feasibility Study	5,000.00
	Garvalt Burn Hydroelectric Project.	50,000.00
	Glenn Eireann House	20,000.00
Gleno Valley Community Association	Gleno Valley Community Association Village Renewal Plan	4,875.00
Ballymena Borough Council	Glenravel Village Renewal Part 2	36,487.50
Awakin Ltd	Go Explore NI - Explore More!	15,000.00
Carnroe Supplies Ltd	Graphic Design Production	14,995.00
Moyle District Council	Gunagh Play Area	37,500.00
Moyle District Council	Hamill Terrace, Bushmills	48,585.00
	Hillhead Fishery	13,633.50
	Hydro Feasibility Study	2,750.00
Glenravel & District Community & Residents Association	Improving Glenravel Amenities	9,000.00
Dervock & District Community Association Limited	K.K. McArthur Festival of Running	14,325.00
	Kearney Vintage Tractors	3,783.34
Crusoes Coffee Shop	Kitchen And Shop Refurbishment	25,000.00
NER	Lough Neagh Co-operation Project	2,000.00
Coleraine Borough Council on behalf of Macosquin Village Community Association	Macosquin Village Plan	5,250.00
Maine Surface Finishing	Maine Surface Finishing - Wet Spraying	49,150.00
AJM Electrical Ltd	Manufacturing of festive lighting illuminations	9,846.74
Tinsdale Bespoke Furniture	Marketing and promotion of bespoke furniture	4,525.00
	Marketing Support for SC Accommodation	3,660.00
	McCollam Marine	3,482.50
	MCM Roadway Recycling	38,000.00
Larne Borough Council	Medieval Churches Project	22,250.25
Feeney Fabrications	Megabender	5,105.00
Ashgrove Engineering	Milling capacity expansion including new machine	50,000.00
Doherty Wood Shavings	Mixing Plant	37,500.00
ASF Engineering Limited	Modernisation of machine tools	12,000.00
ASF Engineering Ltd	modernisation of machine tools and marketing of asf engineering	22,567.50
Moyle District Council	Mosside Village Plan	3,000.00
Moyle District Council	Moyle District Council Public Realm Projects	187,031.25
Ballymena Borough Council	Myths & Legends Podcasts	5,000.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Ballyprint.com	New Equipment	18,250.00
	new machinery	8,250.00
AQUAHOLICS	new purpose built dive vessel	50,000.00
North Antrim Ulster-Scots Culture and Heritage Region Hub (Na rUSh)	North Antrim Region Ulster-Scots Hub (Culture and Heritage Centre)	3,750.00
RPD Roofing	Office & Storage for RPD Roofing	46,000.00
CM Recycling	Operations Building	50,000.00
Broughshane Centre of Early Learning	Outdoor Play Area	14,285.00
	painting Victorian iron bridge	6,226.54
C McNicholl Portable Welding Service	Portable Welding Service	8,711.25
Portglenone Enterprise Group Property Limited (PEG)	Portglenone Village Renewal	47,328.75
Predator Charters Ltd	Predator Charters Ltd	47,430.00
The Village Garden (Broughshane)	Preserving Rural Heritage in Broughshane	1,140.00
Maine Surface Finishing	Primer Booth Installation	50,000.00
Bush Caravan Park	Project Works to Bush Caravan Park	28,239.00
PS Engineering	PS Steel Sales	12,500.00
Redbay Powerboating	Redbay Powerboating – Commercial Tourism Training Development	31,000.00
	Renewable energy	2,750.00
Larne Enterprise Development Co.Ltd. (LEDCOM)	Rural Conference Centre	33,000.00
Martin Contracting Services Ltd.	Rural contracting services business	23,724.00
	Rural Craft Production	45,000.00
Mid Antrim Tractors	Rural Export Support	5,000.00
Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Partnership	Rural Tourism Marketing	75,000.00
Seatons Marina	Seatons Marina Development	38,994.00
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	Sense and Sustainability - A local sustainable tourism conference	5,000.00
David Stewart Engineering	Sheet Metal Production	38,315.00
Solve Engineering	Solve Engineering	5,453.00
CM Recycling	Static Woodchip Screening machine for CM Recycling business innovation	50,000.00
Stranocum & District Development Group	Stranocum Village Action Plan	5,250.00
Benbrook Enterprises	Structural Insulated Panel System	50,000.00
Paul Johnston Associates	Sustainable development and fisheries preservation	6,274.00
GAA Kit.com	TFMX-C1506 six head multi-needle garment embroidery machine	18,000.00
	Timber Recycling	6,000.00
Moneycarrie Engineering Ltd	To purchase a CNC plasma cutting machine	45,000.00
Tober Recycling	Tober Aluminium Recycliing	50,000.00
	Translator's Office & facilities	21,738.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Tullans Farm Holiday Park	Tullans Farm upgrade and extension stage 1	50,000.00
Cushendall Sailing and Boating Club	Ulster Laser Sailing Championships at Cushendall	2,711.25
	Victoria Glenn Design	1,900.00
NER	Village Links	5,000.00
Portballintrae Residents Association	Village Plan	5,250.00
Ballycarry Community Association	Village Plan Ballycarry	5,250.00
Rasharkin Community Association	Village Plan For Rasharkin	1,875.00
Millbrook Community Development Association	Village Plan Millbrook	5,250.00
Castlerock Community Association	Village renewal - Castlerock	35,482.50
Chain HR Ltd	Website Development and E-Marketing	4,593.75
	Wind Feasibility Study	2,500.00
	Wind Turbine Study	2,370.00
Philip Stewart Engineering	Workshop Expansion	35,000.00
	150kw wind turbine	2,750.00
Ballymena Borough Council	3 Rural Recreational Multi Use Games Areas	440,000.00
	3D High Definition Scanning	32,525.13
Ballymarlow & District Community Group	A Development and Growth Project for Ballymarlow & District Community Association	62,853.00
Maine Surface Finishing	Additional Paint Facilty	50,000.00
Agquip Ltd	Advanced Manufacturing Solutions	49,750.00
Larne Borough Council	Antrim Hills Walking Festival	6,750.00
Coleraine Borough Council	Articlave Village Renewal	62,499.75
Ballymoney Borough Council	Ballybogey Multi-Use Games Area	62,499.75
Ballymaconnelly Renewal Group	Ballymaconnelly Renewal Project	6,836.25
Black's Organic Farm	Ballyvennaught hydro-electric scheme	50,000.00
Ballymena Business Centre	BBC 20KW PV Solar Project	30,000.00
Glenariff Improvement Group	Beach Cafe Feasibility Study	2,500.00
Bestbusprice.com	Bestbusprice.com	6,030.00
Broughshane Environmental Waterfowl & Wildlife Trust	Broughshane Waterfowl & Wildlife Centre	81,682.50
The Bushmills Trust	Bushmills Heritage Tourism Project	45,165.00
	Business Expansion - Eventco	30,025.00
	Cafe/Coffee Shop	50,000.00
	Cameron Steele Physiotherapy	45,353.50
Loft Sound LLP	Capital Equipment Acquisition & Expansion Program	21,850.00
Tinsdale Specialist Joinery Ltd	Capital Investment	16,750.00
	Carncairn Hydroelectric	50,000.00
Carnlough Community Development Group Ltd	Carnlough Village Implementation - Phase One	12,375.00
National Trust	Carrick a Rede - Beyond the Bridge	43,500.00
	Castletown Caravan Park	45,000.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism	Causeway Coast & Glens Visitor Itineraries Marketing	75,000.00
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	Causeway Coastal Route Interpretation Project - CCGHT Strategic Interprative Benches	7,800.00
Ballymoney Borough Council	Cloughmills Biodiversity Riverside Walk and Activity Area	55,230.00
Moyle District Council	Cushendun Caravan Park Camping Pods	28,125.00
	Davison Renewable Energy	50,000.00
	Day Nursery	50,000.00
Ballymoney Borough Council	Dervock Community Facilities	247,500.00
	Development and diversification of existing private music business in rural location.	1,700.00
	Diversification into renewable energy generation at townland of Ballydown	2,750.00
Ballymoney Borough Council	Drumaheglis Tourism Development Project	465,800.00
	Dunamallaght Farm Self Catering Accommodation	50,000.00
Dunloy Development Partnership	Dunloy Community Centre	250,000.00
E M Autorepairs	EM Auto Repairs	1,500.00
	Engineering Workshop	20,750.00
Moyle District Council	Enhancing the sea based tourism product on the North Antrim Coast	352,886.00
Entyre Recycling Ltd	Entyre Recycling Ltd	50,000.00
Ballygally Community Development Association (BCDA) Ltd	Establishing a Social Enterprise & Community Hall	109,000.00
	Extension & Redevelopment Stage 2	14,700.00
Eagle Glen Community Patnership Ltd	Extension to Community Centre	176,250.00
Larne Borough Council	Family Recreation Area on the Fair Hill	62,499.75
J.L. and A.I. Baxter Farm Partnership	Farranlester wind turbine	2,750.00
	Feasibility study into a potential micro hydro-electric scheme at Knockan, Broughshane.	2,750.00
Festival Productions	Festival Productions	11,500.00
	Gaining Geographical Information Systems capabilities	3,400.00
Garvagh Development Trust (GDT)	Garvagh Village Renewal	45,142.50
Garvagh Development Trust (GDT)	Garvagh Village Renewal - Phase 2	17,357.25
Glenravel & District Community & Residents Association	Glenravel Village Renewal	17,010.00
The Glens Youth Club Ltd	Glens Youth Club	222,570.00
Larne Borough Council	Gobbins Cliff Path - Steel Staircase	403,087.00
‘Everafter’ Graveyard Solutions Survey Solutions (NI) Ltd	Graveyard Solutions	23,325.00
H&T Woodend	H&T Woodend Wind Turbine Installation	50,000.00
Moyle District Council	Hamill Terrace Public Art	12,000.00
Okotech Ltd	heatboss	7,200.00

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Larne Borough Council	Heritage led 'treasure trail' through Glenarm Village	50,400.00
	Hydro Electric Scheme	2,750.00
	Hydro scheme, Farranmacallan Rd, Torrhead	2,750.00
	Hydro-electric Scheme	2,750.00
	Hydro-electric Scheme	2,750.00
	Hydro-electric Scheme	2,750.00
Loughgiel Community Association Ltd	Improvement of Early Years Services in a rural community	113,753.32
North East Region Lag	Innovative Village	5,000.00
North East Region Local Action Group	Innovative Village	61,200.00
	Investigation of Renewables including Wind Turbine(s)	2,750.00
Kearney Vintage Tractors	Kearney Vintage Tractors Business Development	12,500.00
Kells & Connor Community Improvement Association	Kells & Connor Community Improvement Initiative	34,648.50
Kells and Connor Communtiy Improvement Association	Kells and Connor History Trail	15,600.00
Ballymena Borough Council	Kells Community Garden	14,880.00
Coleraine Borough Council	Kilrea Play Park & Recreational Area	129,990.75
Coleraine Borough Council	Kilrea Village Renewal	62,499.75
Kings Country Cottages	King Country Cottages	5,070.00
Laragh Lodge	Laragh Lodge Marketing Development	5,906.50
Learning to Grow	Larne Lough Centre for Traditional and Environmental Skills	50,000.00
Learning to Grow	Larne Lough Therapy Garden	35,400.00
Loughgiel Community Association	Loughgiel Sowing Seeds For A Healthy Future	127,125.00
Low Carbon Solutions Ltd	Manufacture of Combined Heat & Power Units	50,000.00
	Mc Closkey GAIA 133 Wind Turbine Installation	38,041.00
	McKillop Renewable Project	2,525.00
	New and upgrade of facilities	43,500.00
Quad-X	New Factory Materials	50,000.00
Countryside Recreation Northern Ireland	North Coast Canoe Trail and Ballintoy Harbour Bothy	45,330.50
Coleraine Borough Council	Orientation & Interpretative Project, Castlerock	27,017.25
Ballymena Borough Council	Portglenone Phase 3	250,000.00
Portglenone Enterprise Group Property Ltd	Portglenone Village Renewal	15,000.00
Cloughmills Community Action Team	Powering Cloughmills	4,125.00
	Provision of veterinary nurse training facilities	17,892.50
Bailey Waste	Purchase/installation of automatic baler	50,000.00
Ramage Contracts	Ramage Contracts	11,702.20
	Rathlin Island Hostle	50,000.00
Coleraine Borough Council	Recreational Area in Articlave	90,049.07

Org Name	Project Title	Grant Awarded
Ballycarry Community Association	Restoration of Ballycarry Heritage	34,132.80
Moyle District Council	Runkerry ASSI Boardwalk	7,219.50
The Sash Renovation Company	Sash Window Manufacturing	12,050.00
	Scott Wind	2,162.50
Scullion Hurls	Scullion Hurls - Developing the business to tourism	10,000.00
	Slemish Camping Barn and Arts Centre	50,000.00
	Springhill hydro-electric scheme	42,207.50
	The Barn @ Dundermotte	49,000.00
Ballymoney Borough Council	The Old Mill Site Feasibility Study	5,000.00
Prettyuseful Map Company Ltd	The Pretty Useful Map Company Ltd	9,714.50
Glenariff Improvement Group	Townland Boundary Marker Scheme	17,812.50
Village Links (Mainstream)	Village Links (Mainstream)	73,000.00
Moyle District Council	Village Renewal Facilitation/Animation in the NER Area	16,125.00
asf engineering limited	Water jet cutting machine	50,000.00
Moyle District Council	Waterfoot Village Improvement Scheme	62,055.75
Moyle District Council	Waterford Watersport & Caravan Amenity Block	96,750.00
	Wind energy diversification	45,575.00
Fergus and Samuel Miskelly	Wind Monitoring Analysis and Feasibility Study	2,750.00
	Wind Turbine	2,750.00
	Wind Turbine Feasibility Study	2,750.00
	Wind Turbine Feasibility Study	2,750.00
	Wind Turbine Feasibility Study	2,750.00
	Wind Turbine on lands at 48 Loughill road	2,750.00
	Woodbank Hydroelectric project	50,000.00
	Ballyvoy Camping Barn	50,000.00
Bailey Architecture	Construction of a new office to facilitate expansion of existing architectural business	17,385.00
Broughgammon Farm	Hydro Electric Feasibility Study	2,500.00
	Indoor exercise areas for horses and dogs at Firgrove Pet Resort and enclosed horse walker.	15,700.00
	Linford power generation	2,750.00
Ashgrove Engineering	Machine Capability Upgrade	50,000.00
	Sandblasting equipment	2,750.00
	Wind Feasibility Study	2,750.00

Agri-environment

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the EU Agriculture Committee has signalled a ring fencing of 25 percent for agri-environment spend, what plans her Department has to match or increase funding for agri-environment?
(AQW 19446/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Agri-environment in the current NI Rural Development Programme accounts for 36% of the overall programme budget. I have no plans at present to increase this percentage for the remainder of the current programming period.

My Department in conjunction with our stakeholders is currently considering the overall needs of agriculture, the environment and rural areas for the future rural development programme. However the shape and size of the 2014-2020 programme and the balance of funding across priorities will be very dependent on the rural development budget available.

The EU Commission rural development proposals require climate change and the environment to be cross cutting objectives for the 2014-2020 programme. The MEP agriculture committee amendment proposes a ring fencing of 25% funding for the agri-environment and organic farming measures. There are however other measures within the proposed regulation which will also contribute to achieving our environmental objectives. The final rural development regulation has not yet been agreed and the list of measures which may contribute to this objective is still subject to change.

DARD: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what was the total spend on hospitality by her Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19493/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Hospitality costs for the Department and its Agencies for 2011-12 were:

2011/12 £53,259

Horse Meat in Food Products: Freeza Meats

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, further to her press statement and pursuant to AQW 18544/11-15, when she became aware that meat from Poland that was being stored at Freeza Meats, Newry and contained 80 percent horse DNA, was being detained due to the packaging and queries regarding labelling and traceability.
(AQW 19503/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD Officials have been aware since the autumn of 2012 that two pallets of meat had been detained at Freeza Meats as part of an ongoing investigation being taken forward by Newry and Mourne District Council.

As a result of sampling carried out behalf of the FSA on the 25th January 2013, it was confirmed to DARD Officials by the FSA at a meeting of Food and Feed Incident Management Group on the afternoon of Friday 1 February 2013 that this material was 80% horse meat.

This information was confirmed in a submission, copied to me at 17.33 on the same day.

Rural Development Programme: Solar Energy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 19010/11-15, to detail the number of successful applications for solar energy in each Local Action Group area in the Rural Development Programme.
(AQW 19543/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of successful applications to Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme for solar energy projects are as follows:

Cluster	Number of Successful Solar Applications
ARC	0
DRAP	2
LRP	2
NER	1
SOAR	1
SWARD	5
GROW	0

Rural Development Programme: Solar Energy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 19010/11-15, to detail the monetary value of each application in each Local Action Group area.
(AQW 19544/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below breaks down the monetary value of applications for solar energy projects supplied in AQW 19010/11-15 into individual project amounts.

Cluster	No of applications	Grant requested £
ARC	2	75,000 75,000
DRAP	1	47,360
LRP	4	15,000 9,479 70,000 44,976
NER	1	30,000
SOAR	1	50,000
SWARD	12	40,000 40,000 55,000 10,500 11,000 11,000 26,000 19,000 7,250 50,000 50,000 6,300
GROW	0	

Cattle: Live Export to Libya

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department is aware of any live cattle export business opportunities to Libya.
(AQW 19554/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is presently no health certification in place to facilitate the export of live cattle to Libya.

Cockle Fishing in Belfast Lough

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cockles were in Belfast Lough in 2009 prior to the experiment of cockle fishing when 13 vessels were allowed to enter Belfast Lough; and how many cockles were in the ground when this experiment was over.
(AQW 19571/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In February 2009, prior to the start of the 2009 experimental fishery, the Belfast Lough Cockle sites were estimated to hold 850 tonnes. In March and June 2010, surveys of the sites indicated a cockle resource of 150 tonnes.

Horses: Illegal Movement

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department was aware of illegal horse movements prior to 25 January 2013.
(AQW 19667/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has been aware of allegations relating to movement of horses which have not been in full compliance with the Horse Passport Regulations (NI) 2010. Compliance checks have been conducted, and where irregularities have been detected, direct action such as the prevention of movement of relevant consignments [to Britain] has been taken.

North Antrim: Social and Economic Infrastructure

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas in North Antrim in line with the Children and Young People's Action Plan 2011-2013.
(AQW 19712/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD takes its Section 75 responsibilities seriously and we are working hard to ensure that children and young people in rural communities throughout NI have a voice in shaping those public policies that impact on their lives.

Most of the Actions in our Children & Young People's Action Plan are not specifically targeted at any particular area of NI although hopefully the actions in the Plan will appeal to young people right across NI, including those living in the North Antrim area and other rural communities too. Our work has delivered on outcomes for children and young people right across rural NI, for instance;

A minimum of 5% of the budget for Axis 3 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13 is directed towards benefiting young people and children. In the North East Region (NER) Joint Council Committee area, which includes the North Antrim area, grant assistance of just over £2 million has been awarded towards projects which are recorded as benefiting children and young people. This represents over 22% of the total allocation currently committed by NER.

Development of the next Rural Development Programme, covering the period 2014 to 2020, is currently underway. The Programme is being developed in line with Europe's priorities for Rural Development, which include social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

The Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster (YFCU) is a leading representative group for young people in agriculture and rural communities in NI. DARD currently provides a 3 year grant of £75k per year to the YFCU (2011-14) subject to YFCU fulfilling five specific work areas, as agreed. These include;

- Joint campaigns and activities in conjunction with the GAA.
  This initiative is bringing young people from different community backgrounds together to work on common issues.
- A schools outreach programme of a cross-community nature.
  Young people in Key Stage 3 and 4 from different community backgrounds are involved in sporting and life based activities together. The aim is to break down barriers and widen experiences in a programme which fits in with the school curriculum.

As stated in our Plan we have, and will continue to meet with children & young people and their representative organisations throughout NI to identify further useful actions that our business areas can take forward to better promote participation and involvement of children and young people in all areas of NI.

Wind Turbines

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have constructed single wind turbines on their land, in the last three years.
(AQW 19738/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no statutory responsibility in the construction of wind turbines on farms or the auditing of them, therefore I cannot answer your question.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DARD Meetings with Supermarkets

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many meetings she has held with major supermarket chains in connection with the recent issue of horse meat contamination.
(AQW 19787/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In order to support the Agri-food industry in my role as DARD Minister, I met with the NI Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) whose members include for example Spar, Costcutter, Vivo, NISA and many local traders, and the NI Retail Consortium (NIRC) whose members include Tesco, Sainsburys, Marks & Spencer and Asda, on 13 February 2013 to discuss the on-going horse meat problem and promote the reputation of safe local produce. A representative from LIDL was also present at the meeting.

North Down: Caravan Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proportion of the £4 million investment by Forest Service for upgrading caravan parks will be allocated to North Down.
(AQW 19916/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A business case is being developed which will consider how best Forest Service can invest the £4 million allocated as part of the Jobs and Economy Initiative.

At this stage no decisions have been taken about how or where the money should be spent.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DARD Meetings with the FSA and DHSSPS

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many meetings she has had with (i) the Food Standards Agency; and (ii) the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety since the news broke of horse meat being found in food products.
(AQW 19939/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have met with the Food Standards Agency on 5 occasions and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety once since the news broke of horse meat being found in food products.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DARD Public Buildings and CAFRE

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether burgers or meat products containing horse meat have been supplied to her Department's public buildings or the College for Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.
(AQW 19947/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that burgers containing horse meat have been supplied to the Eurest outlets at Greenmount and Loughry campuses of CAFRE. CAFRE has a service contract with Eurest (a subsidiary of Compass) which commenced in August 2011, to provide catering across the three CAFRE campuses.

Compass took the precautionary measure of withdrawing from the menu all burgers supplied by a manufacturer within its supply chain, whose products were referred to in the media and sent samples for testing. Subsequently, on Thursday 14 February, the test results revealed traces of equine DNA which Compass notified immediately to CAFRE Management. On Friday 15 February, as soon as CAFRE received written confirmation from Compass, all staff and students were notified of the situation.

I can also confirm Serco provides the catering services in Dundonald House. They are not aware of any instance where horse meat has been confirmed in any of the products sold by them.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what information she has provided to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for their inquiry into the vaccination of badgers and cattle in England and Wales in relation to Bovine TB.
(AQW 20137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee's inquiry into the vaccination of badgers and cattle in relation to Bovine TB.

While the role of the EFRA Committee is to examine the policy of Defra, we shall respond to any requests the Committee may make to DARD and shall be interested to see the outcome of its inquiry.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

DCAL: Nominations for Queen's New Year Honours

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list every person, including Olympians and Paralympians, whom she nominated for an Honour within the Queen's New Year Honours.
(AQW 18202/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): None.

Department of Education

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will achieve savings of £40million by the end of the budgetary period.
(AQW 19206/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The creation of ESA will assist in the delivery of two areas of savings within the Department's Savings Delivery Plan. Firstly, the establishment, under ESA of a regionalised schools development service importantly secures future professional development in schools whilst savings of the £25million per year are being delivered from the budget for professional support for schools. Secondly, the regionalisation of education administration, under ESA, shall make that administration sustainable amidst the £15 million savings being made per year from the administration and management costs of DE's arms-length bodies.

Finally, and more longer term, the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit's three reports into the scope for cost reduction in educational services outline further the potential for ESA to realise savings. A key finding of these reports was that there was often unexplained variation in practice and in costs across the Education & Library Boards. A central theme of the reports was the scope to improve value for money by operating services on a more consistent basis, learning from and applying good practice that already exists within some ELBs and best practice from elsewhere.

The establishment of ESA will require the design and delivery of support services that operate consistently across all parts of the north. This provides an early opportunity to address unnecessary variations in practice and to apply learning and best practice in line with the recommendations of PEDU. That work is now being taken forward.

Teachers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many teachers, who have qualified in the last two years, have failed to obtain employment as a teacher.
(AQW 19419/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Not all graduates will have registered with the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) as they may wish to teach elsewhere or to pursue a different career path. The table below details the number of teachers who have qualified in the last two years; the number who registered and of those registered the number who failed to obtain any employment as a teacher in schools in either a permanent or temporary capacity. Figures do not include teachers employed in Voluntary Grammar Schools.

Graduate Year	Graduate numbers	GTCNI Registered Graduate numbers	Number of registered graduates failing to find employment as a teacher
11/12	662	538	70
12/13 (to date)	639	484	101

DE: Salary Payment Unit Costs

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what is the unit cost of producing a salary payment by (i) his Department's Teachers Branch; (ii) an Education and Library Board; and (iii) a voluntary grammar school.
(AQW 19469/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The unit cost of producing a salary payment by (i) DE Teachers' Pay Team and (ii) each Education and Library Board are detailed in table below: -

	Unit cost Financial Year 2011/2012
DE Teachers' Pay Team	£3.96
BELB	£5.45
WELB	£6.15
NEELB	£7.95
SEELB	£8.25
SELB	£7.93

The Department does not hold this information in respect of Voluntary Grammar Schools and to obtain it would be disproportionate in terms of cost.

Voluntary Grammar Sector: Procurement of Goods and Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what is the annual value of goods and services procured by the Voluntary Grammar sector.
(AQW 19470/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not possible to accurately identify from voluntary grammar school accounts the annual value of goods and services procured by sector, as certain categories of expenditure may contain costs not solely associated with the procurement of goods and services. This includes expenditure on sports and games, or health and safety. It is also not possible to separate the total value of those goods and services procured using public funding and those procured using other funding sources.

The total expenditure classified by voluntary grammar schools as other operating costs and expenditure on school meals and canteen provision (i.e. excluding all staff salaries) was £38 million in 2011-12. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of this expenditure will be on the procurement of goods and services.

It should be noted this figure does not generally include expenditure associated with preparatory departments or boarding departments. However, some schools do not separate school meal and canteen expenditure for preparatory departments and in such cases the total expenditure for the school has been included.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that they do not hold details of which contracts are utilised by particular schools, however, all schools can access Board contracts and are issued with usernames and passwords for ELBCAT.

Preschool Admissions Criteria

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the change in legislation on children with July and August birthdays on applications within each school sector.
(AQW 19471/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The July/August priority pre-school admissions criterion was introduced to address concerns that children with a July/August birthday, if they failed to secure a pre-school education place, would not benefit from an educational experience until after their fifth birthday when they commenced primary education.

There is no educational reason why older children should have priority access to pre-school education. The legislative amendment was made to remove a provision which evidence indicated may have a detrimental effect on younger children's educational outcomes.

When this requirement was introduced the level of pre-school provision stood at around 45%. Provision has increased significantly since then, reflected in the current Programme for Government commitment to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Removal of this priority admissions criterion will therefore promote equality of access to pre-school education at all types of pre-school setting.

Northern Ireland Curriculum

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the current nursery curriculum as a basis for developing a revised foundation stage of the Northern Ireland curriculum.
(AQW 19472/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Learning to Learn Framework proposed ensuring that experiences in primary school build more effectively on the child's previous education and learning experiences, and included the proposal to extend the Foundation Stage to include a non compulsory year (pre-school) and two compulsory years (primary), with one foundation curriculum to incorporate pre-school.

The curricular guidance for pre-school education is designed to support and promote good quality pre-school educational provision and outlines the range of learning opportunities which children of this age should have through play and other relevant experiences. The Foundation Stage aims to build on pre-school learning experiences by providing children with an appropriate learning programme to develop their dispositions to learn and to provide them with the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in school and future life.

The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12 states that "A greater number of primary schools need to develop links at key transition stages, from pre-school to Foundation Stage."

The proposal to extend the Foundation Stage to include the non compulsory pre-school year is aimed at enabling primary schools to develop better links between the existing statutory primary and non statutory pre-school curricula and building more effectively on the previous learning experiences of children ensuring a continuum of provision.

The focused consultation concluded on the 31 January 2013 and I will consider the comments received during consultation and their impact on the current proposals before finalising the way forward.

Ministerial Advisory Group on the Advancement of Shared Education

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education for an update on the work of the Shared Education Working Group.
(AQW 19500/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Ministerial Advisory Group on advancing shared education has engaged with a wide range of key stakeholders, individuals and interested parties with a call for written submissions in October/November 2012. They also visited a number of projects and examples of good practice throughout the North of Ireland. Further information can be obtained from the Queens University Belfast website: http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/MinisterialAdvisoryGroup/ProgrammeofWork/

I anticipate receiving their report by the end of this month.

Home-to-School Transport Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail, for each of the last three years, (i) the number of (a) primary school pupils; and (b) post-primary school pupils enrolled at schools within Translink Metro zones; and (ii) as a proportion of each total, how many pupils were eligible for free travel on existing Metro services through the Home to School Transport scheme.
(AQW 19527/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board has supplied the following information:

	Number of pupils enrolled in BELB schools within Metro Zones	Number of pupils eligible for Metro passes	Proportion of total enrolment with passes
2011/1 Primary Post Primary	21,835 29,584	119 1256	0.54% 4.25%
2010/11 Primary Post Primary	21,611 29,818	133 1260	0.62% 4.23%
2009/10 Primary Post Primary	21,648 29,922	152 1173	0.70% 3.92%

GCSE Examinations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the meetings he has had with his counterparts in other regions of the United Kingdom to discuss proposed revisions to GCSE examinations.
(AQW 19538/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I met with my Ministerial counterparts in Wales and Scotland to discuss proposed revisions to GCE / GCSE examinations as detailed below:

- Leighton Andrews AC / AM on 4 July 2012
- Michael Russell MSP – Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong learning on 24 August 2012

I sought a meeting with Michael Gove to discuss changes to GCSE and A level qualifications, in September 2012. He declined to meet with me. I will however be discussing qualifications reform with Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Education (in England) on 28 February 2013.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant of AQW 19038/11-15, to detail the findings of the (i) Deloitte assignment on the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) delivery models and location options; and (ii) Price Waterhouse Coopers assignment into the provision of an assessment centre for ESA.
(AQW 19579/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Deloitte assignment produced recommendations for an organisation structure for the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to Head of Service level. Their recommendations were designed also to help inform the development of locations options for ESA, including ESA headquarters (HQ), sub-regional offices and other related accommodation. The document is detailed and so I have arranged for a copy of it to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Under the same assignment Deloitte also produced a paper on ESA location strategy. This was completed in April 2010 and suggested a decentralised model with the clustering of relevant services for purposes of efficiency.

The Price Waterhouse Coopers assignment in question was to design and manage a recruitment process for the appointment of seven Directors to ESA. The process was consistent with the four principles set out in the NICS Commissioner's Code, including the design and implementation of an assessment centre. The recruitment process commenced on 15 June 2009 with the advertisement of seven Director posts for ESA. The initial recruitment process saw the appointment of six of the seven Directors. In October 2009 a second competition was run to appoint the seventh Director which concluded at the end of December 2009 resulting in no successful appointments being made.

Non-recognition of A-levels in the Republic of Ireland

Mr Storey asked Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16096/11-15, for an update on the current situation.
(AQW 19582/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA continue to work with their counterparts in the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and Central Applications Office (CAO), to address issues relating to Applied A Levels, BTECs and the A* grade. I have decided that these issues should be included within the scope the fundamental review of GCSEs and GCE A Levels here.

Following a meeting between the IUA and CCEA in November 2012, they are now analysing statistical information with a view to producing a joint paper highlighting a number of fundamental issues about the current system which need to be addressed. It is not possible to give an exact timescale for production of this report. However, CCEA has advised that details of the work to be undertaken will be finalised and timelines agreed with the IUA in the near future.

Review of Teacher Education

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16370/11-15, for an update on the current situation.
(AQW 19598/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The proposed strategy document will represent the culmination of the most detailed review of teacher education undertaken in the last thirty years. Work to update and refine the contents of the strategy has been ongoing and I have asked officials to brief me further on the broad proposals contained in it.

The final strategy document will be published with the agreement of the Minister for Employment and Learning and following further engagement with key stakeholders.

School Closures

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many pupils have been affected by school closures in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 19600/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total number of pupils affected by school closures in each of the last ten years will include those who were attending the schools at the time of their closure, as well as those attending schools to which pupils transferred and, potentially, those children who would otherwise have attended the school, had it not been closed.

Of these three groups, the Department is only able to provide information on the number of pupils attending the school at the time of the school census previous to the school closure. This information has been provided, for each of the last ten years, in the table below.

Pupils attending schools which were closed in 2002/03 – 2011/12

Year of closure	Pupils attending schools closed during that year
2002/03	339
2003/04	65
2004/05	111
2005/06	457
2006/07	373
2007/08	712
2008/09	623
2009/10	123
2010/11	323
2011/12	352

Source: School census.

Note: Figures relate to children attending nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools in the years specified.

Voluntary Grammar Sector: Procurement of Goods and Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what services are procured by voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools from Education and Library Boards.
(AQW 19602/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not possible to accurately identify from voluntary grammar school accounts the annual value of goods and services procured by sector, as certain categories of expenditure may contain costs not solely associated with the procurement of goods and services. This includes expenditure on sports and games, or health and safety. It is also not possible to separate the total value of those goods and services procured using public funding and those procured using other funding sources.

The total expenditure classified by voluntary grammar schools as other operating costs and expenditure on school meals and canteen provision (i.e. excluding all staff salaries) was £38 million in 2011-12. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of this expenditure will be on the procurement of goods and services.

It should be noted this figure does not generally include expenditure associated with preparatory departments or boarding departments. However, some schools do not separate school meal and canteen expenditure for preparatory departments and in such cases the total expenditure for the school has been included.

The Education and Library Boards have advised that they do not hold details of which contracts are utilised by particular schools, however, all schools can access Board contracts and are issued with usernames and passwords for ELBCAT.

Children from Ethnic Minorities: Educational Attainment

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how the attainment of children from ethnic minorities is monitored; and for his assessment of their current level of attainment.
(AQW 19617/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The attainment of all children including those from ethnic minorities is monitored on an ongoing basis by their teachers in their schools. Teachers assess pupils work as part of their day to day teaching. They observe how pupils carry out classroom activities and will assess how pupils are progressing.

Additionally, the annual school leavers' survey which collects the qualifications and destinations of all pupils leaving grant aided post primary schools provides information on the attainment of pupils at the point at which they leave school and includes information on the attainment of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Data from it show that pupils from ethnic backgrounds who stay on to take level 3 qualifications perform above the average for all pupils against the key indicators of 2 + A Levels (or equivalent) and 3+ A Levels (or equivalent) at grades A*-E. Performance at 5 + GCSEs A*-C is similar to average but falls below the average when the indicator includes GCSE English and maths. The performance of Traveller pupils however is significantly below that of other minority ethnic pupils across all three indicators.

This information is used to inform policy and practical interventions to support pupils, particularly those whose first language is not English, to reach their full potential. For example, my Department supports the Education and Library Boards and schools through the work of the Inclusion and Diversity Service and the Traveller Education Support Service to take positive action to address the additional educational needs of Traveller and Newcomer children to help close the performance gap and ensure these pupils can access the curriculum and get involved in every aspect of school life.

Education: Funding for Deprived Areas

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, given the link between educational underachievement and deprivation, why funding from his Department which is aimed at deprived areas is not greater.
(AQW 19624/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is a key aim of the Executive to address the challenges of disadvantage and inequality that afflict society, including through closing the gap in educational underachievement between those who are least and those who are most disadvantaged. Consequently, the work of number of Departments is critical to creating the conditions to make better outcomes possible, particularly through integrating different services, aligning them with the work of schools, and helping schools reach into their communities.

My focus is to provide coherent, sustained and effective evidence based interventions that break the cycle of deprivation and educational underachievement.

High quality teaching and learning are at the heart of tackling educational underachievement. I have a coherent suite of policies in place to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement in schools. These policies include the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum, entitlement framework, the framework for early years education and learning and the SEN and inclusion review.

The Common Funding Formula provides all schools with additional core funding to help meet the educational needs of children from socially deprived backgrounds and those underperforming for their age. In the current 2012/13 financial year, the Department distributed £56.9 million through the Common Funding Formula, under the Targeting Social Need factor.

I am not satisfied, however, that the current Scheme sufficiently targets social deprivation. I, therefore, commissioned Sir Robert Salisbury's recently published review of the Common Funding Scheme, which has recommended increased levels of formula funding for pupils from deprived backgrounds through the introduction of a pupil premium. I will assess the impact of this recommendation, along with the others in the report, very carefully to inform my own proposals for change, which I intend to bring forward later in the year.

In addition, my Department dedicates substantial resources to provide a range of assistance, programmes and services to ensure that disadvantaged children have access to and can fully participate in school life, obtain formal qualifications, enhance their employment opportunities and ultimately provide a route out of poverty. These include the provision of Free School Meals and clothing allowances and a range of programmes targeted at socially deprived areas, including Sure Start, extended schools, full service provision, Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures and nurture units.

My Department also has a key role in working with a number of Departments to ensure a coherent approach to proactively tackling disadvantage and improving educational outcomes. This includes the Department for Employment and Learning, in relation to the Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme and the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister on a literacy and numeracy project, which will recruit 230 additional teachers.

East Belfast: School Leavers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for only 68.3 percent of school leavers in the East Belfast constituency attaining five GCSEs Grade A*-C.
(AQW 19703/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have in place a coherent set of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for all our young people and to address the root causes when pupils are not achieving to their full potential. These policies include the school improvement policy, "Every School a Good School" and the strategy for improving literacy and numeracy, "Count, read: succeed". I remain committed to tackling educational underachievement wherever it exists.

The most recent statistics available show that these policies are working, with continued improvements in pupil attainment at GCSE level for all school leavers in the north of Ireland as well as for pupils resident in the East Belfast constituency.

	School leavers resident in the East Belfast Constituency*1		School leavers in the north of Ireland	
	2006/07	2010/11	2006/07	2010/11
Percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents)	59.8	68.3	64.7	73.2
Percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) inc. GCSE English and maths.	52.1	58.2	54.2	59.5

*1 Please note the data are based on the residential postcode of each pupil and not on the location of the school.

The challenge now is to ensure the effective implementation of these policies by all schools so that the improvement in educational outcomes continues, with particular emphasis on how they contribute to raising standards for those pupils entitled to free school meals.

Indeed, the Programme for Government 2011-2015 has a stretching target to raise the percentage of school leavers, entitled to free school meals, achieving five or more GCSEs (or equivalent) including GCSE English and maths by 2015.

In addition to these policies I launched an advertising campaign in September last year which aims to inform and engage all parents, but in particular those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, to become more engaged in their child's education. The campaign provides parents with consistent, authoritative information on schooling and the steps they can take to support their child in achieving good educational outcomes.

£12million will also be invested to improve literacy and numeracy levels in schools over the next two years. The will result in 230 unemployed teachers being appointed as part of a programme to ensure extra support for children in primary schools who are struggling with reading and maths. It will also direct support to pupils in post-primary schools who are not predicted to get at least a 'C' grade in English and/or maths

Both the advertising campaign and intervention to support the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in schools complement the policies I have in place to support raising standards and to achieve improved outcomes for all our young people.

Education Works Campaign: Posters

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18910/11-15, to detail (i) the number of posters produced in (a) English; and (b) Irish; and (ii) the cost of the poster element of the campaign to date.
(AQW 19716/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The number of posters produced for the Education Works campaign is as follows:

	No of posters produced	No of posters posted on sites
(a) English	5	588
(b) Irish	3	28

(ii) The total cost of the poster element of the campaign to date is £52,304.

Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education how much funding his Department will contribute to the new Education Maintenance Allowance scheme.
(AQW 19736/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education will contribute £1.85 million in 2013/14 and £3.6 million each year from 2014/15 to the new Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) Scheme.

In addition, the Department will continue to provide additional resources of approximately £345,000 each year to help schools fund the costs associated with the administration of the scheme.

The Department's total funding for the EMA scheme, therefore, amounts to almost £2.2 million in 2013/14 and £3.95 million from 2014/15.

Through this funding the Department will ensure that the EMA Scheme continues to support young people in greatest need to remain in education, to achieve formal qualifications, break the cycle of poverty and low educational attainment and, in turn, enhance their lifetime opportunities.

South Belfast: Post-primary Schools

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) most recent enrolment; and (ii) capacity figures for each of the South Belfast post-primary schools, broken down by sector.
(AQW 19758/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below:

Actual and Approved Enrolments in post-primary schools in South Belfast 2012/13

School name	School type	Management type	Actual Enrolment	Approved Enrolment
St Joseph's College	Secondary	Catholic maintained	538	664
Malone Integrated College	Secondary	Grant Maintained Integrated	708	800
Wellington College	Grammar	Controlled	783	770
Methodist College	Grammar	Voluntary - Other managed	1,784	1,810
The Royal Belfast Academical Institution	Grammar	Voluntary - Other managed	1,045	1,050
Rathmore Grammar School	Grammar	Voluntary - Catholic managed	1,273	1,260
Victoria College	Grammar	Voluntary - Other managed	874	870
Hunterhouse College	Grammar	Voluntary - Other managed	708	710
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	Grammar	Voluntary - Catholic managed	819	770
Knockbreda High School	Secondary	Controlled	395	600
Newtownbreda High School	Secondary	Controlled	697	850

Source: NI school census.

Note: Pupils admitted to year 8 on appeal or by direction of the Exceptional Circumstances Body, and pupils with a statement of special educational needs are included in the actual enrolment figure but do not count towards the approved enrolment figure. Further, the approved enrolment figures do not take account of any temporary increases to that number granted to the school by the Department under the temporary variation policy.

DE: Regional Training Unit

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent by the Regional Training unit in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19777/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The Regional Training Unit spend in the last five years is as follows:

- 2007/08 £3,047k
- 2008/09 £3,107k
- 2009/10 £2,992
- 2010/11 £3,346k
- 2011/12 £2,407k

(ii) The Regional Training Unit spend in the last five years in respect of the Professional Qualification for Headship is as follows:

- 2007/08 £625k
- 2008/09 £876k
- 2009/10 £714k
- 2010/11 £858k
- 2011/12 £790k

Schools: Compliance with Building Bulletin 93

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education whether all schools built since 2007 are fully compliant with Building Bulletin 93.
(AQW 19778/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All schools built since 2007 are required to be compliant with BB93 through the use of appropriate design, materials and construction techniques.

If a school identifies issues with sound transmission post-construction, these are fully investigated by a suitably qualified acoustician and where necessary, appropriate remedial works are carried out.

Education and Library Boards: Maintenance Expenditure

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18560/11-15, for his assessment of the impact of this expenditure on the maintenance backlog in each Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 19779/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The education estate is large, encompassing some 1200 schools, and has a significant number of old buildings that have an increased maintenance burden associated with ageing.

The level of maintenance backlog fluctuates continuously due to changes in the assets in the schools' estate. Increases occur due to asset deterioration, identified from a rolling programme of asset surveys. Reductions result from maintenance being carried out, from assets being replaced (through investment in major and minor works) or from assets being disposed of. The level of Category 1 (very poor asset condition) and Category 2 (poor condition) maintenance backlog has remained reasonably consistent in the last three years rising from just under £300m in 2010 to its current figure of just over £300m.

It should be noted that not all maintenance (and minor works) expenditure will directly impact on the level of maintenance backlog. Whilst the Education and Library Boards undertake a programme of planned maintenance across the schools' estate that influences the level of maintenance backlog (typically targeted at Category 1 maintenance issues), they are also required to undertake reactive maintenance to address unexpected emergency issues such as a heating system failure and repairs due to flood damage or vandalism. The cost associated with such inescapable works is not reflected in the maintenance backlog.

It is also important to note that while the system records the maintenance backlog for all schools in the estate, the Education and Library Boards are only responsible for carrying out maintenance in the controlled, maintained and Irish Medium sectors. Almost one fifth of the total backlog relates to assets in other sectors that are responsible for their own maintenance (grant maintained integrated, voluntary and other). Funding for these schools includes an allocation for maintenance

As Minister I have recognised the need to try and stem the inexorable rise in maintenance across the estate and tackle the historic underinvestment in schools. My ability to do so is obviously limited by the resources to do the work. I have increased significantly the level of funding ring-fenced for maintenance this year and next. This level of investment will help address the maintenance backlog and I would anticipate a reduction in the overall figure in the coming years as the rolling programme of asset surveys is updated.

Computer-based Assessments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools had completed their computer based assessments by the end of December 2012.
(AQW 19780/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CCEA wrote to all schools on 20 December advising that the assessment period had been extended until 11 January 2013, allowing schools additional time to complete the assessments.

CCEA has confirmed that 96% of the NINA (Numeracy) assessment and 95% of the NILA (Literacy) assessments in student terms had been completed by 11 January 2013.

In terms of the number of assessments completed by schools by the end of December 2012, the following statistics were correct as of 20 December 2012.

A summary of the assessment status from the 856 schools which uploaded pupil data (approximately 88,000 pupils) is provided in the tables below. Just over 780 schools (see Table 2) completed 90% or more of NILA and NINA.

Table 1: Summary of assessment status

Description	NINA	NILA
No. of schools started assessments	843	844
No. of schools completed assessments	389	394
No. of pupils completed assessments	84,072*	84,013*

* - Included IM

Table 2: Summary of assessments completed

School assessments completed	Number of schools (and percentage of total primary schools)	
	NINA	NILA
90% +	787(92%)	781(91%)
75% +	811(95%)	808(94%)
50% +	826(96%)	821(96%)

All of the above statistics were provided by CCEA.

School Transport

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what negotiations he has had with Translink on cost reductions for the provision of school transport; and to outline the timescale for the completion of these discussions.
(AQW 19781/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) is responsible for negotiating the Translink contract on behalf of all Boards. I have been informed by the SELB that, as part of the normal contracting process with Translink, costs for school transport have not increased since 2010. Additionally rebates to the value of £500,000 in the financial year 2011/2012 and £300,000 in the current financial year have been achieved in negotiations with Translink by the SELB on behalf of the Department of Education.

Further contractual discussion on future cost reductions will be scheduled to take place with the onset of the forthcoming financial year.

Gender Specific Teaching

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for an update on plans to conduct further research into gender specific teaching methods.
(AQW 19783/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At this stage I have no plans to commission such research. We already have a significant body of research and inspection evidence that identifies the effective characteristics of high quality teaching. That evidence does not support the thesis that there is a single, preferred teaching method for boys - or indeed for girls

Rather it is important that pupils, whatever their gender, can see the relevance of what they are taught and make connections across different areas of learning. The revised curriculum offers teachers the flexibility they need to do this and to encourage pupils to explore and identify their individual preferred learning styles. Additionally, high quality teaching will include appropriate differentiation to meet the needs and learning styles of individual pupils, again with the focus on the pupil not on his or her gender.

Our evidence shows that good teachers in effectively led schools already deliver high quality teaching and learning to meet the needs of their pupils regardless of gender. Our challenge is to ensure that good practice is embedded effectively in all our schools for the benefit of all our pupils.

Education: Support for Male Pupils

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether each school will be required to offer male pupils support during their key transitional stages.
(AQW 19784/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Teachers use their professional judgment to assess whether a pupil requires support at all stages of their education. This assessment may include classroom observation, analysis of formative assessment or use of other data such as results from public examinations and the findings of school inspection reports. It is teachers, with their knowledge of a child and supported by parents and school leaders, who are best placed to identify the need for and most effective means of support and intervention for each pupil regardless of gender.

My Department and its delivery partners also assess potential areas of underachievement and where the need for additional action has been identified steps are being taken to address it such as the introduction of Extended and Full Service schools and SureStart programmes.

My Department is currently studying the recommendations contained in the recently published report "Taking Boys Seriously – A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experience in Northern Ireland" by the University of Ulster and will consider whether any additional action may be required.

Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education, given that Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt is a Core School and meets the Sustainable Schools Criteria, why it is not a priority for new build.
(AQW 19792/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware of the desire for a new build for Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt, and I met with the school Principal, the Chair of the Board of Governors, and local representatives on 12 February to discuss firsthand.

You will appreciate that I have difficult choices to make with many schools desperately in need of new builds competing for limited capital funding.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment across the estate and the proposals for Holy Family PS will be considered alongside other priorities as part of any future capital announcement.

Education Bill

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education how many schools, Boards of Governors and parents have written to his Department expressing concern about the Education Bill.
(AQW 19795/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have received 44 letters expressing concern about the Education Bill.

The details are outlined below.

- 1 letter received on behalf of the Association of Principals Teaching in Integrated Schools.
- 39 letters received on behalf of the Board of Governors of Integrated Schools.
- 4 letters from MLA's on behalf of constituents.

I have not received any letters from parents.

Causeway School Museum

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Education whether there are any plans to withdraw funding from the Causeway School Museum in the North Eastern Education and Library Board; and to explain the reason for any such plan.
(AQW 19797/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board have taken the decision to close the non-statutory services it currently provides at the Causeway School Museum due to financial constraints.

Chinese Language

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to promote the study of Chinese in schools.
(AQW 19801/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Modern languages are a statutory requirement at KS3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and Sixth form. Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages, and the revised curriculum offers schools more flexibility in the choices of subjects they can offer to meet the needs of their pupils. The revised curriculum has broadened the range of modern languages that schools can now offer so that, instead of being limited to choosing from 5 languages as previously, schools are now able to choose any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the minimum requirement, as well as any other additional languages they wish, including Chinese/Mandarin. The revised curriculum also includes scope for schools wishing to offer language learning at primary level before it becomes a statutory requirement at Key Stage 3.

I recognise the importance of language learning both socially and economically. To compete as a global economy we need a workforce that can communicate effectively with people from all backgrounds, including those from the international business community. With this in mind, I have recently met with Mr Shen Yang, Minister Counselor (Educational), Chinese Embassy and with representatives from the Confucius Institute at the University of Ulster to discuss its proposed Confucius Classroom scheme and I have asked for further information to enable me to consider if my department can assist with this.

The Member may also wish to note that the British Council, which is part funded by my Department, administers a number of initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of Chinese language and culture as well as increasing internationalism and links between schools here and in China e.g. study visits, summer immersion courses, student placements etc., all of which are open to schools in the north. It has also recently produced an education pack - Snakes and Dragons - for primary schools to explore Chinese culture and language with pupils in the run up to the Chinese New Year and beyond. The pack was sent to all primary schools in the north in January 2013.

Education: Procurement of Goods and Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18557/11-15, when he will publish the report on the work of the project team.
(AQW 19802/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have written to advise all key stakeholders of the outcome of the project to determine the future delivery of procurement services in the education sector.

The project included significant engagement with other government departments and agencies. The project team met a number of procurement staff from the Education and Library Boards both formally and informally during the lifespan of the project.

Procurement staff within ESA will continue to be responsible for a range of functions. It is not envisaged that there will be a reduction in professional procurement staff within the education sector. However, there may be the opportunity for a small number of procurement staff to apply for secondment to CPD, as education specialists. The numbers required will become clearer as the project to implement the transfer of education procurement services to CPD goes forward.

Education: Professional Qualification for Headship Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much the Regional Training Unit has spent on the Professional Qualification for Headship in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19803/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The Regional Training Unit spend in the last five years is as follows:

- 2007/08 £3,047k
- 2008/09 £3,107k
- 2009/10 £2,992
- 2010/11 £3,346k
- 2011/12 £2,407k

(ii) The Regional Training Unit spend in the last five years in respect of the Professional Qualification for Headship is as follows:

- 2007/08 £625k
- 2008/09 £876k
- 2009/10 £714k
- 2010/11 £858k
- 2011/12 £790k

Education: Procurement of Goods and Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19134/11-15, how many staff from his Department will transfer to Central Procurement Directorate.
(AQW 19804/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have written to advise all key stakeholders of the outcome of the project to determine the future delivery of procurement services in the education sector.

The project included significant engagement with other government departments and agencies. The project team met a number of procurement staff from the Education and Library Boards both formally and informally during the lifespan of the project.

Procurement staff within ESA will continue to be responsible for a range of functions. It is not envisaged that there will be a reduction in professional procurement staff within the education sector. However, there may be the opportunity for a small number of procurement staff to apply for secondment to CPD, as education specialists. The numbers required will become clearer as the project to implement the transfer of education procurement services to CPD goes forward.

Education: Procurement of Goods and Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many meetings took place with staff in the procurement sections of the Education and Library Boards to discuss possible options for the future procurement of goods and services within the education sector.
(AQW 19805/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have written to advise all key stakeholders of the outcome of the project to determine the future delivery of procurement services in the education sector.

The project included significant engagement with other government departments and agencies. The project team met a number of procurement staff from the Education and Library Boards both formally and informally during the lifespan of the project.

Procurement staff within ESA will continue to be responsible for a range of functions. It is not envisaged that there will be a reduction in professional procurement staff within the education sector. However, there may be the opportunity for a small

number of procurement staff to apply for secondment to CPD, as education specialists. The numbers required will become clearer as the project to implement the transfer of education procurement services to CPD goes forward.

School Transport

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with other Ministers on the regulation of school transport provided by private operators.
(AQW 19806/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have had no direct contact with other Ministers in relation to the regulation of school transport provided by private operators. However, officials from the Department of Education have been working recently with their counterparts in the Department of the Environment in relation to the cabotage issue which affected private transport operators contracted to provide school services in the Western Education and Library Board area.

Sure Start

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education whether the Glenariffe, Cushendall and Cushendun wards in Antrim, and the Coast Road ward, Carnlough will be included in the expansion of Sure Start provision to an additional 21 wards.
(AQW 19808/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I plan to extend Sure Start services to encompass the top 25% areas of disadvantage at ward level subject to the availability of resources. Cushendall and Cushendun are not wards; they are within the wards of Glenaan and Glendun. The wards of Glenariff, Glendun, Glenaan and Carnlough do not fall within the top 25% most disadvantaged wards as measured by the Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM) and are not therefore included in the expansion of the Sure Start programme.

Primary Schools: Capital Investment in Newbuilds

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to detail the value of the capital investment in new build primary schools since 1999, broken down by constituency.[R]
(AQW 19810/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The capital investment in new build primary schools since 1999, broken down by constituency is detailed in the table below.

Primary School	Construction Costs (million)	Parliamentary Constituency
Orangefield Primary School, Belfast	7.0	Belfast East
Belmont Primary School, Belfast	1.3	Belfast East
Cregagh Primary School, Belfast	1.31	Belfast East
Loughview Integrated Primary School, Belfast	0.38	Belfast East
Loughview Integrated Primary School, Belfast	1.59	Belfast East
Total	**11.58**	
Cavehill Primary School Belfast	2.21	Belfast North
Lowwood Primary School, Belfast	1.71	Belfast North
Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey	3.59	Belfast North
Total	**7.51**	
Finaghy Primary School, Belfast	2.93	Belfast South
St Bride's Primary School, Belfast	0.94	Belfast South
Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Belfast	1.3	Belfast South
Taughmonagh Primary School, Belfast	3.09	Belfast South
St Ita's Primary School, Carryduff	3.35	Belfast South
St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff	5.9	Belfast South
Total	**17.51**	
Forthriver Primary School, Belfast	1.55	Belfast West
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Derriaghy	1.98	Belfast West
Gaelscoil na bhFal Primary School, Belfast	2.0	Belfast West

Primary School	Construction Costs (million)	Parliamentary Constituency
St Clare's Primary School, Belfast	2.57	Belfast West
St Kevin's Primary School, Belfast	2.96	Belfast West
Bunscoil an Tsleibhe Dhuibh, Belfast	1.17	Belfast West
Scoil na Fuiseoige	1.68	Belfast West
Total	**13.91**	
St MacNissi's Primary School, Larne	1.21	East Antrim
Total	**1.21**	
Damhead Primary School, Coleraine	0.92	East Londonderry
Carnalridge Primary School, Portrush	1.6	East Londonderry
Drumrane Primary School	1.1	East Londonderry
Total	**3.62**	
Gracehill Primary School, Ballymena	1.7	North Antrim
Bushvalley Primary School, Ballymoney	0.59	North Antrim
Camphill Primary School, Ballymena	2.9	North Antrim
Leaney Primary School, Ballymoney	1.74	North Antrim
Fourtowns Primary School, Ahoghill	2.2	North Antrim
Moorfields Primary School	2.1	North Antrim
Millquarter Primary School, Toomebridge	0.82	North Antrim
Ballymena Maintained Primary Schools (x2)	5.0	North Antrim
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone	3.9	North Antrim
St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School, Ballycastle	3.9	North Antrim
Total	**24.85**	
Loanends Primary School, Nutts Corner	0.98	South Antrim
Mossley Primary School, Newtownabbey	4.2	South Antrim
Templepatrick Primary School	3.9	South Antrim
St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	2.47	South Antrim
Creggan Primary School, Randalstown	1.00	South Antrim
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Lisburn	1.05	South Antrim
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Forkhill	1.52	South Antrim
Total	**15.12**	
Moira Primary School	1.18	Lagan Valley
Riverdale Primary School, Lisburn	1.27	Lagan Valley
Meadow Bridge Primary School	1.72	Lagan Valley
Downshire Primary School	3.13	Lagan Valley
Ballinderry Primary School	2.3	Lagan Valley
Pond Park Primary School, Lisburn	4.9	Lagan Valley
Christ The Redeemer Primary School, Dunmurry	3.1	Lagan Valley
Ballymacward Primary School, Lisburn	1.09	Lagan Valley
Ballymacrickett Primary School	2.90	Lagan Valley
St Colmans, Lambeg	2.62	Lagan Valley

Primary School	Construction Costs (million)	Parliamentary Constituency
Total	**24.21**	
Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor	4.09	North Down
Ballyholme Primary School, Bangor	3.8	North Down
Towerview Primary School, Bangor	3.6	North Down
Total	**11.49**	
All Children's Controlled Integrated Primary School, Newcastle	1.32	South Down
Cumran Primary School, Clough	1.6	South Down
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	1.5	South Down
Bronte Primary School, Banbridge	1.2	South Down
Drumadonnell Primary School	1.2	South Down
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	2.45	South Down
St Colman's Primary School, Saval	0.84	South Down
Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint	2.9	South Down
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	3.13	South Down
Total	**14.94**	
Castle Gardens Primary School, Newtownards	2.7	Strangford
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	3.31	Strangford
Dundonald Primary School	5.25	Strangford
Newtownards Model Primary School	4.98	Strangford
Victoria Primary School, Ballyhalbert	1.50	Strangford
Total	**17.74**	
Richmond Primary School, Ballygawley	0.9	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Orchard County Primary School, Portadown	1.19	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Blessed Patrick O'Loughran Primary School, Castlecaulfield	0.84	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Windmill Integrated Primary School, Dungannon	2.12	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Florencecourt Primary School	0.7	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Maguiresbridge Primary School	1.06	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Kesh Primary School	1.71	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Lisbellaw Primary School	2.3	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
St Ninnidh's Primary School, Derrylin	1.02	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	2.4	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Coranny & Cornagague Primary School, Roslea	1.58	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Total	**15.82**	
Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown	3.0	Mid - Ulster
Woods Primary School, Magherafelt	0.7	Mid - Ulster
St Patrick's Primary School, Donaghmore	1.88	Mid – Ulster
Magherafelt Primary School & Nursery School	4.68	Mid - Ulster
St Columba's Primary School, Straw	1.56	Mid - Ulster
Total	**11.82**	

Primary School	Construction Costs (million)	Parliamentary Constituency
St John's Primary School, Armagh	0.81	Newry and Armagh
Our Lady & St Mochua's Primary School, Keady	1.05	Newry and Armagh
Dromintee Primary School, Newry	2.1	Newry and Armagh
St Peter's Primary School, Cloughreagh	3.2	Newry and Armagh
St Joseph's Primary School, Madden	1.3	Newry and Armagh
Total	**8.46**	
Ballydown Primary School, Banbridge	1.54	Upper Bann
Maralin Primary School	2.2	Upper Bann
Waringstown Primary School	1.4	Upper Bann
Total	**5.14**	
Drumahoe Primary School, Derry	0.94	Foyle
Lisnagelvin Primary School	5.5	Foyle
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School, Derry	2.6	Foyle
St Patrick's Primary School, Pennyburn	4.18	Foyle
Total	**13.22**	
Gibson Primary School, Omagh	2.6	West Tyrone
Bready Jubilee Primary School, Strabane	0.86	West Tyrone
Cooley Primary School, Omagh	1.19	West Tyrone
Edwards Primary School, Castlederg	1.8	West Tyrone
Killen Primary School	1.1	West Tyrone
St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher	1.7	West Tyrone
St Dympna's Primary School, Dromore	1.22	West Tyrone
Total	**10.47**	

Teachers: Principals and Vice-principals Redundancy Scheme

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education whether he or his officials have had discussions with Trade Unions and teachers representatives regarding redundancy or enhancement packages for vice-principals and principals.
(AQW 19842/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The nature of a principal post is such that it is possible to make a principal redundant only in cases of school closure or amalgamation. Vice-principals can be made redundant if the particular post is being suppressed or through a transferred redundancy if the employing authority does not require the vice-principal post to be publicly advertised.

Officials have been engaged in discussions with teacher unions and employers about the reintroduction of a scheme which would allow the early release of a limited number of teachers in the interests of the efficient discharge of the employer's function. Such a scheme would be intended to improve the quality of educational provision in schools and would be subject to approval of a business case and the availability of resources. As with redundancy, it would not be an option to be offered simply to accommodate a teacher who wishes to retire prematurely.

Schools: Community Use of School Premises

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what guidance has been issued by his Department or Education and Library Boards to schools on community use of school facilities.
(AQW 19845/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's Guide for School Governors "Every School a Good School -The Governors' Role" provides guidance to schools with regard to making their premises available for wider community use. A Working Group report, 'How Best to Increase the Community Use of the School Site', published in 2011, also provides practical guidelines for schools to help them enhance the community use of school premises.

As part on ongoing efforts to promote greater community access to school facilities, a further Working Group led by the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools was established to develop detailed operational guidance to assist school leaders in dealing with the many practical issues which must be considered when making school premises available for wider community use.

The draft guidance which the Working Group produced is currently being considered by my Department. Once finalised, the guidance will be made available to all schools.

Whilst there are no financial incentives available, the guidance will outline the potential benefits to schools of greater community involvement and highlight how more effective partnering of schools with the communities they serve can lead to better access to essential services, improved local availability of sports, arts and other facilities and improved outcomes for families and children.

The guidance will also include a range of case studies which will demonstrate existing good practice and the benefits which have been achieved and will hopefully inspire those schools not already opening their doors for wider public use to consider doing so.

Careers Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of a full-time postgraduate course being the only professional qualification for teachers in Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance; and what consideration he is giving to funding suitable part-time courses in this competency.
(AQW 19860/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The joint DE DEL "Preparing for Success" careers strategy endorses the partnership model of careers guidance as the preferred model of provision for young people. The strategy makes clear that careers teachers and careers service advisors have distinct but complementary roles. Schools are responsible for providing effective careers education for which a specific careers guidance qualification is not required but should provide access to the qualified professional expertise and impartial advice and guidance available through the careers service.

My officials are continuing to explore methods to help build the capacity of careers teachers to lead, manage and deliver an effective careers programme is for pupils through training modules.

Careers Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how his Department ensures that Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (i) complements the curriculum and is consistent within, and between, schools; (ii) informs young people of the jobs available in a modern economy; and (iii) equips young people to access and analyse Labour Market Information.
(AQW 19861/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am fully committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of careers education across all schools and my Department is taking this forward through the full and continuing implementation of the joint DE DEL careers strategy.

Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of careers education and implementation of the careers strategy. The Education and Training Inspectorate has developed tailored, quality standards indicators for self-evaluation, and my Department has published a Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) map and guide. The CEIAG map and guide aims to improve the quality of career learning opportunities, define the key features of a CEIAG programme, and encourage greater consistency across schools. The CEIAG map recognises that within every single area of learning of the curriculum there are opportunities to raise pupil's aspirations and help them make connections between learning, work, and career choices.

In addition, all schools are members of Area Learning Communities (ALCs). ALCs are required to report to the department annually by way of an implementation plan on 4 key strategic entitlement framework priorities, one of which is to develop and deliver a careers programme which assists young people in making informed choices around courses and pathways open to them. The core principle of the entitlement framework is to guarantee equality of access for all young people to a broad, balanced and more economically relevant curriculum with clear progression pathways. The flexibility offered by the entitlement framework means that schools are able to take account of labour market information and priority growth areas in developing their curricular offer.

Schools have partnership agreements with the Department for Employment and Learning's Careers Service which provides pupils with impartial advice and guidance and access to a wide range of up-to-date careers information such as labour market information factsheets and case studies. Employers also play an important role in providing careers information and advice and my officials have been engaging with business representative bodies to explore how the business community can play a greater role in careers education.

Careers Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether schools have adequate resources to provide high quality Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance.
(AQW 19862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) scheme, the Board of Governors of every grant maintained school receives a delegated budget to meet the costs of providing access to the curriculum within that school. How the school delivers the curriculum to meet the statutory requirements is a matter for the Board of Governors and senior management team of that school. Impartial advice and guidance is provided free to schools in partnership with Careers Service through the full and continuing implementation of the joint careers strategy and action plan.

East Londonderry: Schools Capital Build Programmes

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education which schools in the East Londonderry constituency have received approval for major capital build programmes since 2007.
(AQW 19875/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My statement to the assembly on 25 June 2012 announced that the process for building three special schools would be advanced; one of these schools was Rossmar Special School which is in the East Derry constituency.

My capital announcement of 22 January 2013 included a new build solution to service the needs of 3 primary schools (Craigback, Mullabuoy and Listress) on the outskirts of Derry. While it is accepted that Craigback and Mullabuoy are in the Foyle constituency, Listress Primary School is in East Derry constituency.

School Meals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what his Department is doing to provide healthier and better choices of school meals.
(AQW 19888/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education (DE) recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development, and for their long term health and well being and has proactively worked to improve the quality of food in schools here.

Compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches have been in place in all of our schools since September 2007. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines) have also been drawn up to which schools are expected to adhere. I have allocated funding of over £3 million in 2012/13 to support the implementation of the standards to ensure that pupils are presented with healthy options and encouraged to eat healthily. DE also provides joint funding for a regional Food in Schools Coordinator to provide specialist support in all aspects of healthy eating.

DE is currently working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to finalise a joint Food in Schools policy which advocates a whole school approach to all food and drinks provided in schools to ensure that all children should develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices now and in later life. I intend, along with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to seek Executive agreement on the policy as soon as possible. Subject to that agreement, it is intended to publish the policy later in this school year.

Donaghadee Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children currently attend Donaghadee Primary School.
(AQW 19889/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures provided by the school for the 2012/13 census exercise indicate a total enrolment of 431 pupils, including 52 pupils in a nursery unit attached to the school.

Donaghadee Primary School

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether there are any plans to expand Donaghadee Primary School.
(AQW 19890/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Any significant change to a school, such as an increase in enrolment, requires an approved statutory Development Proposal.

To date, the South Eastern Education and Library Board has not brought forward such a proposal for Donaghadee Primary School.

Integrated Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19042/11-15, how projected need within the integrated sector will be assessed through the area planning process in areas that currently do not have a local option for integrated primary or post-primary education.
(AQW 19891/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards, which are the statutory planning authorities within their areas, have adopted a Needs Model as the means of assessing the need for places in each of their District Council areas. The model uses the most up to date, complete and reliable data available at any point in time. It reflects the current pattern of enrolments between, broadly, the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors, and as such is the starting point for planning.

The process of engagement with the various sectors will provide the opportunity for them to make a case for the expansion or contraction of their particular sector. Such cases should be based on objective evidence. This will enable the Boards (working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools), to take account of all relevant circumstances, including demand for and supply of places in all sectors. The bodies involved in integrated education, including NICIE and the schools themselves, should engage with the Boards to make a case for increased provision where they think the data warrant it. No sector is limited to the growth shown in the model. It is vital, however, that robust data are presented to support a case for opening a new school or expanding an existing one, as, if the integrated sector is to grow beyond the projected figures in the model, there must be a consequent reduction in numbers elsewhere to live within the total planning figure.

I should add that, because the Needs Model provides data at District Council level only, it is not a basis for making decisions about the siting, opening or closing of individual schools. Such decisions must be made taking account of local circumstances in the context of the overall numbers in the model.

I must stress that the area planning process is iterative and plans will be kept under review and will change over time to reflect changing circumstances and developing needs.

Schools: Community Use of School Premises

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what measures his Department is taking to incentivise the opening of schools for community use.
(AQW 19902/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's Guide for School Governors "Every School a Good School -The Governors' Role" provides guidance to schools with regard to making their premises available for wider community use. A Working Group report, 'How Best to Increase the Community Use of the School Site', published in 2011, also provides practical guidelines for schools to help them enhance the community use of school premises.

As part on ongoing efforts to promote greater community access to school facilities, a further Working Group led by the Education and Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools was established to develop detailed operational guidance to assist school leaders in dealing with the many practical issues which must be considered when making school premises available for wider community use.

The draft guidance which the Working Group produced is currently being considered by my Department. Once finalised, the guidance will be made available to all schools.

Whilst there are no financial incentives available, the guidance will outline the potential benefits to schools of greater community involvement and highlight how more effective partnering of schools with the communities they serve can lead to better access to essential services, improved local availability of sports, arts and other facilities and improved outcomes for families and children.

The guidance will also include a range of case studies which will demonstrate existing good practice and the benefits which have been achieved and will hopefully inspire those schools not already opening their doors for wider public use to consider doing so.

School Canteens

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools which have a (a) school canteen operated by a private firm; and (b) a canteen operated by the school or the Education and Library Board.
(AQW 19909/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The details requested are as follows:-

	Private Firm	School/ELB
Primary	6	872
Post-Primary	10	215

Teachers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many currently employed teachers have served a prison sentence.
(AQW 19926/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Neither the Department of Education nor the Employing Authorities hold this information.

The AccessNI Code of Practice and Explanatory Guide stipulates that, once a recruitment decision has been made, an employer must not retain Disclosure Information or any associated correspondence for longer than is necessary. In general this should be for a maximum of six months.

Teachers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what vetting arrangements are in place across the various sectors in relation to the appointment of teachers.
(AQW 19928/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education requires all Employing Authorities and schools to obtain an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate (criminal records check) from AccessNI before appointing a teacher. Details of convictions and other information disclosed in a Certificate must be considered by the employer before a teaching appointment is confirmed.

Schools: Class Sizes

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to bring forward legislation to cap class sizes for primary 5 to primary 7 classes.
(AQW 19948/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There has been considerable research carried out on the effect of class sizes on the teaching and learning of pupils. While evidence suggests that smaller class sizes in early years can have a positive impact on outcomes, it has also consistently highlighted that the quality of teaching and allowing teachers the flexibility to adapt their teaching in different situations, are the most important factors in determining educational outcomes. These key factors are reflected in core Departmental policies, namely DE's literacy and numeracy strategy and the revised curriculum. In view of the evidence surrounding the early years, it is DE's policy to keep classes for our youngest pupils, (Years 1-4), to a maximum of 30 pupils.

There is no evidence to demonstrate that smaller class sizes positively affect outcomes for pupils in Years 5-7 and in line with DE's policy to give schools as much autonomy as possible, it is a school's Board of Governors that has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's education budget which would include class sizes, taking account of parameters set for Years 1-4.

Ultimately, what is essential for good quality provision is high quality teaching, a curriculum that is matched to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils and a focus on improvement and raising standards.

The Revised Curriculum which has been in place since 2009/10 allows our teachers to tailor the curriculum to suit the needs of their pupils and to adapt their teaching. In addition, the effective use of data to track pupil progress allows teachers to identify those pupils at risk of not achieving their full potential and enabling them to adapt the strategies they use in their delivery of the curriculum, customising it to best effect.

Furthermore, the recent findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) and Trends in Mathematics and Science (TIMMS) studies of Year 6 pupils shows that our Key Stage 2 outcomes show high attainment at primary level education.

Based on the above I have no plans to review or consider a cap on class sizes for pupils in Years 5-7.

Homework Clubs in South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education, given the levels of educational underachievement in working class areas, to detail the financial support allocated by his Department to homework clubs in South Belfast, over the last three years.
(AQW 19950/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not make specific provision for homework clubs or routinely collect information on such clubs.

However, the Extended Schools programme provides additional funding to schools serving the most deprived areas, and which meet set criteria, to provide for a wide range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day which aim to remove barriers to learning and improve levels of educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people. Where assessed as needed by school principals, this provision may include after school learning support activities such as homework clubs.

The Belfast and South Eastern Education and Library Boards have confirmed that a total of 22 schools have qualified for Extended Schools funding in the South Belfast constituency in 1 or more of the last 3 financial years. Of those, 15 schools currently provide after school learning support activities/homework clubs with the aid of Extended Schools resources. Details are provided in the tables below.

Eligible Extended Schools in South Belfast (BELB)	Extended Schools Allocation 2010/11	Extended Schools Allocation 2011/12	Extended Schools Allocation 2012/13	After School Learning Support/ Homework Club 2012/13
Arellian NS	£9,430	£9,430	£10,660	No
Rosetta PS	Did Not Qualify	Did Not Qualify	£26,976	Yes
Nettlefield PS	£28,100	£29,038	£33,150	Yes

Eligible Extended Schools in South Belfast (BELB)	Extended Schools Allocation 2010/11	Extended Schools Allocation 2011/12	Extended Schools Allocation 2012/13	After School Learning Support/ Homework Club 2012/13
Taughmonagh PS	£25,243	£24,898	£27,820	Yes
Donegall Road PS	£19,045	£18,400	£22,457	No
Fane Street PS	£20,211	£21,678	£25,967	No
Blythefield PS	£12,300	£13,225	£14,690	Yes
Botanic PS	£23,805	£23,920	£26,780	Yes
Holy Rosary PS	Did Not Qualify	£27,773	£30,226	Yes
St Malachy's PS	£23,200	£28,290	£33,150	Yes
Scoil an Droichid	£14,875	£18,314	£21,093	Yes
Cranmore Integrated PS	£23,144	£19,225	£25,187	Yes
St Joseph's College	£36,363	£36,122	£40,626	Yes
Malone Integrated College	£38,249	£33,250	£42,706	Yes
Fleming Fulton Special School	£18,573	£18,486	£19,240	No
Harberton Special School	£23,230	£23,489	£26,650	No
Park Education Resource Centre	£16,848	£18,400	£19,436	Yes
Glenveagh Special School	£23,230	£22,713	£25,967	No
Oakwood Special School	£14,375	£15,295	£17,583	No
Totals	**£370,221**	**£401,946**	**£490,364**	

Eligible Extended Schools in South Belfast (BELB)	Extended Schools Allocation 2010/11	Extended Schools Allocation 2011/12	Extended Schools Allocation 2012/13	After School Learning Support/ Homework Club 2012/13
Belvoir Park PS	£23,900	£23,400	£30,486	Yes
Knockbreda HS	£30,770	£29,850	£29,510	Yes
Newtownbreda HS	Did Not Qualify	Did Not Qualify	£42,004	Yes
Totals	**£54,670**	**£53,250**	**£102,000**	

Schools: Learning Support Units

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many learning support units operate within post-primary schools in the (i) controlled (ii) maintained; and (iii) integrated sectors, broken down by location.
(AQW 19963/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Post primary schools with learning support centres 2012/13

School name	Education and Library Board	Management type	No of Learning Support Centres
Ballymoney High School	North Eastern	Controlled	3
Banbridge High School	Southern	Controlled	1
City Armagh High School	Southern	Controlled	4
Clounagh Junior High School	Southern	Controlled	3
Coleraine College	North Eastern	Controlled	3

School name	Education and Library Board	Management type	No of Learning Support Centres
Cookstown High School	Southern	Controlled	1
Dundonald High School	South Eastern	Controlled	3
Glengormley High School	North Eastern	Controlled	1
Kilkeel High School	Southern	Controlled	1
Larne High School	North Eastern	Controlled	2
Lisneal College	Western	Controlled	1
Magherafelt High School	North Eastern	Controlled	2
Monkstown Community School	North Eastern	Controlled	2
Orangefield High School	Belfast	Controlled	1
Tandragee Junior High School	Southern	Controlled	2
De La Salle High School, Downpatrick	South Eastern	Catholic Maintained	1
Drumcree College	Southern	Catholic Maintained	2
Our Lady of Lourdes High School, Ballymoney	North Eastern	Catholic Maintained	3
St Brigid's College, Shantallow	Western	Catholic Maintained	2
St Ciaran's High School, Ballygawley	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Columban's College, Kilkeel	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Joseph's College, Belfast	Belfast	Catholic Maintained	4
St Joseph's College, Coalisland	Southern	Catholic Maintained	4
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	South Eastern	Catholic Maintained	5
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Mary's High School, Downpatrick	South Eastern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Patrick's Co-ed Comprehensive College, Maghera	North Eastern	Catholic Maintained	1
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	Southern	Catholic Maintained	2
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn	South Eastern	Catholic Maintained	3
St Paul's High School, Bessbrook	Southern	Catholic Maintained	1
Blackwater Integrated College	South Eastern	Grant Maintained Integrated	3

Source: School census

Learning Support Units: South-Eastern Education and Library Board Area

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education at which locations learning support units are operating in controlled post-primary schools in the South Eastern Education & Library Board area.
(AQW 19964/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Figures provided by schools for the 2012/13 census exercise indicate that Dundonald High School was the only controlled post-primary school in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area in which learning support centres were operating. Three learning support centres were recorded as being in operation at the school.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DE Advice to Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what advice his Department has given to schools on the ongoing horse meat issue.
(AQW 19993/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is important to note that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised that there is no reason or evidence to suspect that there is a food safety risk from products which contain horse meat or horse meat DNA. However, it is not acceptable that mislabelled frozen meat products have been found in the food supply chain.

In line with advice provided by the FSA, I have written to the Chief Executives of the ELBs to emphasise that, whilst there is no evidence that products which contain horse meat or horse DNA pose a food safety risk, in circumstances where a Board is made aware that mislabelled frozen meat products are being supplied to schools it is imperative that immediate action is taken by the ELB to ensure these products are withdrawn and removed from school menus.

The ELBs remain in close contact with their suppliers to ensure that they are updated as soon as a supplier is made aware that a product may be mislabelled and that the necessary action is taken. I am aware that the ELBs wrote to schools and school meals kitchens last week, following the decision by a supplier to withdraw certain burger items pending receipt of test results, to advise that these products must not be used and will be removed by the supplier.

The Department has also written to schools in the voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated sectors to advise that where a school is made aware that mislabelled frozen meat products are being supplied to schools immediate action should be taken by the school to ensure these products are withdrawn and removed from school menus.

I have agreed that the Food Standards Agency will circulate to the Department and the Boards any communications in relation to the horse meat incident/investigation.

I consider that through this approach we can ensure collectively that early action is taken to seek to ensure that mislabelled products are not supplied to schools.

Schools: Capital Build Projects

Mr Storey asked Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19188/11-15, what approval stage has been achieved by each project.
(AQW 19994/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Progress as at 19 February 2013 on the 18 capital build projects announced in June 2012 is shown in the table below:

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Victoria Park Primary School	Mid May 2013	Stage C approval. Design work continuing. Waiting for final EA to be submitted to Department.
Eglinton Primary School	June 2014	Stage C approval. Design work continuing. EA has been submitted to the Department and currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Foyle College / Ebrington Primary School	Autumn 2013	Stage C approval. Design work continuing. Waiting for Stage D approval to finalise EA.
Enniskillen Model	August 2014	Stage C and costs due July 2013. EA has been submitted to the Department and currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Dromore Central	Sept 2013	Stage C approval. Design work continuing. Waiting for final EA to be submitted to Department.
St Clares Primary School Newry & St Colman's Abbey Primary School Newry	September 2013	Stage D approval. PQQ templates with Project Manager. PQQ expected March 2013. Department waiting for additional information to finalise EA.
St Mary's Primary School Banbridge	August 2013	Stage C approval. Revised Stage D requested by DE. EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Tannaghmore Primary School Lurgan	June 2013	Stage D approval. EA has been submitted to Finance Director for submission to DFP.
St Teresa's Primary School Lurgan	May 2013	Stage D approval. EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Colaiste Feirste	November 2013	Stage C approval. Revised stage D requested by DE. Awaiting approval of Stage D before EA can be finalised.
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	August 2013	Stage C approval. Design work continuing. EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Belmont House Special School -Derry	June 2014	Consultants to be appointed. Economic Appraisal awaited.
Rossmar Special School Limavady	May 2014	Consultants to be appointed. Economic Appraisal awaited.
Castletower Ballymena	2015	Consultants to be appointed. Department waiting for final EA to be submitted.

Schools: Reception Classes

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19185/11-15, to list the schools that have reception classes, broken down by (i) Education and Library Board area; and (ii) management type.
(AQW 19995/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details reception classes solely made up of reception pupils. It should be noted that reception age pupils may also be enrolled, not in distinct reception classes, but in groups alongside pupils of compulsory school age.

In addition to the reception classes listed there are 84 primary schools with 299 reception pupils who are integrated with Year 1 – 7 pupils.

Management Type	Education and Library Board	School name	Reception pupils
Controlled	North-Eastern	Hezlett Primary School	17
Controlled	North-Eastern	Macosquin Primary School	10
Controlled	North-Eastern	Randalstown Central Primary School	8
Catholic Maintained	North-Eastern	St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim	25
Catholic Maintained	North-Eastern	St Patrick's Primary School, Portrush	7
Catholic Maintained	South-Eastern	St Joseph's Primary School, Newcastle	12
Catholic Maintained	South-Eastern	St Mark's Primary School, Dunmurry	25
Catholic Maintained	Western	Holy Family Primary School, Omagh	14

Source: School census

Conductive Education

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 18515/11-15, what research his Department has carried out into Conductive Education as a method of teaching.
(AQW 20011/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not, to date, carried out any research into Conductive Education as a method of teaching.

Schools: Capital Builds in East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education which (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in the East Londonderry constituency have been (a) assessed as requiring Capital Build replacement; and (b) are not currently listed in the Capital Investment announcement.
(AQW 20018/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Over the years the department has received many proposals for new school builds which have not progressed. I have made clear that these historic applications have no standing. However they can come forward again for consideration, if identified as a priority, when capital investment decisions are being made.

The key criteria in determining eligibility for capital investment in my recent announcement has been alignment with emerging area plans and confirmation from Managing Authorities of their priorities for new builds within their areas.

The selection of new major works has been on the basis of effecting rationalisation; supporting unmet need; addressing serious accommodation inadequacies and schools operating on split sites, substandard conditions or overcrowding; or addressing undue reliance on temporary accommodation.

In discussions with the WELB in advance of my January 2013 capital investment statement Ballykelly Primary School within the East Derry constituency was identified as a priority for a new build, however due to budget constraints could not be included in my announcement.

The reality is that the budget settlement for this Spending Review period means that the need for investment far exceeds the funds available.

DE: Underspend

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's projected underspend for this financial year.
(AQW 20024/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In line with its performance in previous years the Department is planning to minimise the level of underspend against both the resource and capital budgets.

Teachers: Pensions

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education, given that three out of four teaching unions that responded to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme are unhappy with the scheme proposals, what further consultations will now take place.
(AQO 3430/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: None of the unions which responded to the consultation are in favour of the principle of increased pension contributions.

I do not agree with the British Government's approach to pension policy.

However, my Department's consultation was not about the principle of delivering the targeted level of savings to the cost of the public sector pension schemes in the north of Ireland, to which the Executive is already committed.

Rather, it was about how the required increases should be structured to provide protection for lower paid teachers and limit the risk of increases in the rate of opt-outs from the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Teachers, like other public servants, are being asked to pay more for their pensions and, regrettably, this will mean a reduction in their take-home pay. There is also a risk that there may be an increase in the number of teachers choosing to opt out of the Scheme.

However, I believe that the contribution increase proposals represent a reasonable and proportionate means of achieving the Executive's objectives of delivering the savings in a way which protects lower paid teachers and limits the risk of increases in the rate of opt-outs from the Scheme.

Extensive consultation has taken place with the teacher unions through the Teachers' Superannuation Consultative Committee, which is the established forum for consultation on matters relating to the Scheme, both prior to and during the formal consultation period which is now closed.

My Department will continue to consult with the teacher unions on pensions matters, including future contributions increases and the wider pension reform agenda.

Education Bill: Teacher and Staff Employment

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education whether there is a contradiction between Clause 10(c) of the Heads of Agreement and Clause 3(1) of the Education Bill, in relation to the employment of teachers and staff.
(AQO 3434/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no contradiction. The Education Bill gives effect to both of the key requirements on employment matters within the Heads of Agreement. Firstly, it will establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) as the employer of all staff in all grant-aided schools. Secondly, it provides for the delegation of employment functions to schools. This will ensure that boards of governors can take all of the employment decisions within their schools if they wish.

Education Bill: Integrated Education Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how the Education Bill will help deliver his Department's statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education.[R]
(AQO 3435/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education Bill will establish the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). ESA will be the operational delivery organisation for all my Department's policies, including the encouragement and facilitation of integrated education.

I will require ESA to ensure that it has sufficient knowledge and expertise on matters affecting integrated education, and to work closely with the Council for Integrated Education - NICIE - in this regard.

Educational Underachievement

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Education to outline the main factors used when assessing underachievement in working class communities.
(AQO 3436/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My literacy and numeracy strategy, Count, read: succeed, describes underachievement as a situation where performance is below what is expected. The strategy outlines that underachievement can apply at different levels, from the performance of an individual pupil through to performance at a system level.

At individual pupil level, teachers use their professional judgment to assess whether a pupil is underachieving. This assessment may include classroom observation, analysis of formative assessment or use of other data as appropriate. Teachers, with their knowledge of a child and supported by parents and school leaders, are best placed to identify the need for and most effective means of intervention.

At school and system level, and using a number of evidence sources, my Department and its delivery partners assess potential areas of underachievement. These sources include Key Stage assessments and GCSE data, the findings of school inspection reports and international surveys.

Research evidence tells us that social disadvantage has an impact on achievement and our own data shows major inequalities within our education system.

We still have too many young people who are underachieving, particularly amongst those entitled to free school meals.

Where the need for additional action has been identified steps are being taken to address it: examples include, Achieving Belfast and Bright Futures Derry, Extended and Full Service schools, SureStart and my Education Works campaign.

However, more needs to be done, especially in areas of social deprivation. For example, Delivering Social Change projects will target additional resources towards those at greatest risk of underachievement.

School Transport: Irish-medium Sector

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Education what progress his Department has made in addressing Lord Justice Treacy's verdict in relation to school transport for the Irish Medium sector.
(AQO 3437/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has been giving careful and detailed consideration to a complex judgment. Following this consideration, a number of options have been developed and then assessed in line with departmental policies and legal advice. I am currently considering the options.

The judgment is only in respect of Coláiste Feirste and not the Irish medium sector.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that the views and opinions of young people will be represented on the board of the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQO 3438/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The views of young people should be heard in relation to all public services, including education.

In relation to the membership of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA), the provisions reflect the Heads of Agreement published by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and were agreed by the Executive.

There is no age qualification for membership of ESA. I would encourage young people to consider applying for appointment to ESA as community members. I would also encourage those bodies that will be given nomination rights to consider how they will use those rights to ensure that the views of young people will be represented.

Schools: New School at Springhill, Belfast

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education when he plans to announce the funding for a new school at Springhill, Belfast.
(AQO 3439/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Belfast Education and Library Board, in common with other Education and Library Boards, has been developing area plans for schools in their area. I expect these plans to include options for primary schools in the Greater Shankhill area. Once these plans have been published and consulted upon, I will take investment decisions subject to the availability of capital.

Education: OECD Visit

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education for an update on the recent visit by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
(AQO 3440/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: We are participating for the first time in a major international review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The review will examine how Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks can deliver improvements for pupils and will involve an in-depth analysis of our education system by independent experts from other OECD countries.

The OECD Directorate of Education is the eminent worldwide source of research and information on effectiveness in education.

We need to learn from other countries. We already benchmark our pupils, we must also benchmark our systems. Our involvement will both help others learn from our experience and critically help us to learn from others.

Following a very successful preliminary visit to meet with key stakeholders, my Department will - later this month - host the main eight day visit by the OECD review team.

I look forward to welcoming the review team and I am delighted that they will have an opportunity to meet with a wide range of stakeholders, including teachers, pupils, principals and governors and the wider education research community.

Teachers: Pensions

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education to outline the potential impact that the proposed increases to employee pension contribution rates will have for local teachers.
(AQO 3441/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: None of the unions which responded to the consultation are in favour of the principle of increased pension contributions.

I do not agree with the British Government's approach to pension policy.

However, my Department's consultation was not about the principle of delivering the targeted level of savings to the cost of the public sector pension schemes in the north of Ireland, to which the Executive is already committed.

Rather, it was about how the required increases should be structured to provide protection for lower paid teachers and limit the risk of increases in the rate of opt-outs from the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Teachers, like other public servants, are being asked to pay more for their pensions and, regrettably, this will mean a reduction in their take-home pay. There is also a risk that there may be an increase in the number of teachers choosing to opt out of the Scheme.

However, I believe that the contribution increase proposals represent a reasonable and proportionate means of achieving the Executive's objectives of delivering the savings in a way which protects lower paid teachers and limits the risk of increases in the rate of opt-outs from the Scheme.

Extensive consultation has taken place with the teacher unions through the Teachers' Superannuation Consultative Committee, which is the established forum for consultation on matters relating to the Scheme, both prior to and during the formal consultation period which is now closed.

My Department will continue to consult with the teacher unions on pensions matters, including future contributions increases and the wider pension reform agenda.

Department for Employment and Learning

Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 18879/11-15, to clarify the position in relation to sex offenders who either fail to disclose their convictions or are subject to a Notification Order banning them from leaving the jurisdiction without police or court consent, specifically where employment agencies are recruiting staff to work abroad.
(AQW 19333/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Further to my answer to AQW 18879/11-15, I would reiterate that there is no specific requirement in the Conduct Regulations, which govern the recruitment sector, to compel a workseeker to disclose a criminal conviction. This applies regardless of the nature of any conviction.

However, a requirement for an employment agency to carry out a criminal record check or Enhanced Access NI check may arise, if the hirer makes it a specification of the post they are seeking to fill, or if such a disclosure is required by law in connection with a particular post.

There are some circumstances in which criminal records checks or Enhanced Access NI checks must be carried out prior to placing workers. Article 13 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order (NI) 2007, for which the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is responsible, requires employment businesses and agencies to ensure that workers who are to engage in “regulated activity” (i.e. with vulnerable adults and children) are not on a barred list. This is done by obtaining an Enhanced Access NI Disclosure certificate. These are required in the case of workers who take up positions in which they will be in contact with vulnerable adults or children. However, any criminal disclosure is required by the nature of the post, and not by the nature of any previous conviction of a workseeker. This legislation only applies to Northern Ireland and to other disclosure schemes operating in the UK.

If a role to be filled does not involve working with vulnerable adults or children, and if the hirer does not make it a stipulation that a clear criminal record is a condition for the role, then the recruitment agency/business has neither a reason nor a legal obligation to seek to obtain a criminal record history for the worker. This remains the case, regardless of the nature of any conviction.

The Department is carrying out a review of the Conduct Regulations as part of its review of employment law. We will consider amending any accompanying guidance to advise employment agencies of best practice when carrying out criminal records checks.

Adults with no Educational Achievements

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what strategies he will be pursuing to achieve departmental targets of reducing the number of adults with no educational achievements.
(AQW 19398/11-15)

Dr Farry: Most of the programmes and services that are funded or delivered by my Department are designed to equip individuals with skills and qualifications that will enable them to find work or to progress within employment and, by so doing, to reduce the number of adults with no educational achievements.

The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland “Success Through Skills – Transforming Futures”, which was published in May 2011, is my Department’s overarching strategy to provide people with economically relevant skills and qualifications. This strategy has identified three main groups of people, namely those entering the labour market, those currently in work, and those who are excluded from the labour market.

Under the strategic direction provided by Success Through Skills, the Department’s main programmes include education provided through our universities and further education colleges, Apprenticeship and training programmes, employment programmes such as Steps to Work and the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS), the Assured Skills programme helping employers to upskill their workforce, the Essential Skills strategy, and recently introduced programmes to deal specifically with youth unemployment such as the Youth Employment Scheme and the NEETs strategy.

My Department has a Programme for Government commitment to deliver 210,000 qualifications at Level 2 and above between 2011/12 and 2015, and we are on schedule to meet this target.

Teacher Education

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given his commitment to integrated education, whether he will consolidate teacher training in an enhanced and expanded Stranmillis Teacher Training College.
(AQW 19575/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am fully committed to the availability of high quality Initial Teacher Education that meets the needs of Northern Ireland and which represents good use of public money. To this end, I have commissioned a study of the teacher education infrastructure and the first stage of this work is now almost complete. The first stage examined the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. Stage two of the study will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning who has been appointed to the interview panel for the appointment of the Chair of the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College.
(AQW 19655/11-15)

Dr Farry: The following people have been appointed to the interview panel for the appointment of the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College: Two senior officials from my Department, Mr Andrew Hamilton, Deputy Secretary and Mrs Nuala Kerr, Director of Higher Education. They will be accompanied by Mrs Stephanie Lowry, an independent panel member appointed by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

This information is included in the Candidate Information Pack available to all interested applicants.

Southern Regional College

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he is in communication with the management at the Southern Regional College regarding their proposed plans to change how teachers are monitored in the classroom for his assessment of the potential damage to the educational experience of students enrolled at the College campuses as a result of any industrial action.
(AQW 19838/11-15)

Dr Farry: All issues relating to the employment of staff in further education colleges are a matter for the colleges' governing bodies, in their capacity as the employing authorities.

Whilst my Department has no role to intervene in these matters, I would urge staff and management sides to work together to reach agreement on this issue. I am hopeful that, through the use of established consultation mechanisms, the need for unnecessary industrial action will be mitigated.

Further and Higher Education: Cross-border Mobility

Ms Ruane asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his work with the Minister of Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, to address the barriers to cross-border mobility at undergraduate level.
(AQO 3416/11-15)

Dr Farry: Cross-border and indeed international mobility in higher education bring significant employability benefits for individual students, contribute to a vibrant economy and enrich the experience within individual institutions. Ultimately however, the decision to take up such opportunity rests with the individual student.

I have previously acknowledged, during the debate on this issue in October 2012, that there is scope for increased co-operation, particularly in the border areas and I am fully committed to ensuring that barriers to collaboration and mobility are addressed.

My Department is actively progressing recommendations of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation and the Confederation of British Industry Joint Business Council report.

In relation to the quality and flow of information, this is being progressed under the Graduating to Success and Preparing for Success implementation plans. Examples of progress include: implementation of the Key Information Sets; representation by universities from the Republic of Ireland at the UCAS Higher Education Fair and attendance by our universities at promotional events in the Republic of Ireland; and provision of impartial advice and guidance by my Department's Careers Service on higher education opportunities, including the Republic of Ireland.

As recommended by that report and the independent student finance review chaired by Joanne Stuart, my Department has enacted key changes; from academic year 2013/14, student- support arrangements for students studying in the Republic of Ireland will align with those studying in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Regarding qualifications, I am advised that the Irish Universities Association and the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment met in November 2012 and are planning to produce a joint paper highlighting fundamental issues which need to be addressed in the current system.

I met with Minister Quinn twice during the past year and engagement between my officials and officials in the Department of Education and Skills continues in this important area.

ICT Working Group

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the work of the ICT Working Group.
(AQO 3417/11-15)

Dr Farry: I established the ICT Working Group in January 2012, involving employers, colleges, universities and other Departments.

The Action Plan produced by the group sets out the actions required to address the current and future skill needs of the sector. These are grouped under key themes of skills provision, sector attractiveness, and co-ordination and communication.

I recently reconvened the working group to review progress against the actions. Progress has been significant and a wide range of actions are being taken forward.

The Public/Private ICT apprenticeship pilot has seen the public sector, together with private sector employers, develop a recruitment and training model to employ apprentices in the ICT sector and develop their skills through on and off the job training. Thirty two apprentices have been employed in the local ICT sector through this scheme.

A Higher Level ICT Apprenticeship pilot commenced in October 2012 with six apprentices undertaking training through South West College. The aim of this pilot is to help raise the skill levels of apprentices in the workplace and facilitate progression directly to higher education.

Furthermore, a second cohort of the Software Testers' Academy was launched. Nineteen participants from the first cohort have gained employment in the ICT sector. The second cohort has places for 24 participants.

Progress has been made in the university sector. Both Queen's University and the University of Ulster now offer postgraduate MSc courses for non-IT graduates, with over 100 students enrolled.

Progress has also been made in the development of the A level curriculum. CCEA has developed a new 'Software and Systems Development' A level, in conjunction with employers. It is envisaged that the course will be available from September 2013.

Another progress review meeting of the ICT Working Group will be in June 2013.

Youth Employment Scheme: Mid-Ulster

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many young people are engaged in Youth Employment Scheme projects in Mid-Ulster.
(AQO 3418/11-15)

Dr Farry: As at 7th February, my Department has secured 50 opportunities for young people under the Youth Employment Scheme in the Mid-Ulster area. Fifteen young people have availed of these opportunities, of which nine have entered full-time employment. 18 young unemployed people have found 6 months paid employment under the First Start initiative.

A very successful Jobs Fair and Advice Forum was held in Dungannon on Friday 7 December 2012, organised by

DEL staff and supported by the local Council. Over 200 jobs were on offer in the retail, manufacturing and agri-foods sectors.

Feedback from all employers has been very positive and the engineering sector has already expressed interest in a further event

A Community Family Support Programme pilot in Cookstown commenced in January 2013 and 17 families have joined the programme.

Under the new Collaboration and Innovation Fund, £0.5 million has been allocated to the South West College, to provide support to 300 unemployed young people in its area, which includes Mid Ulster.

During the last 15 months, 41 unemployed young people from Mid Ulster have received personalised support from the Local Employment Intermediary Service.

These programmes are in addition to the Department's full range of support. From April to December 2012, the Employment Service helped 832 young unemployed people find employment in the Mid-Ulster area: this is 8.5% above target for the period.

On the Youth Employment Scheme generally, at 7th February, 822 employer agreements have been signed and 957 placements secured. 217 young people have been placed, of which 94 have secured full-time employment.

I would again urge all members to encourage businesses in their respective areas to support the Youth Employment Scheme and the various initiatives we are putting in place for unemployed young people. It is also important to encourage young constituents to avail of the opportunities.

Steps to Work Programme

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people have gained employment as a direct result of the Steps to Work programme in South Antrim.
(AQO 3422/11-15)

Dr Farry: The aim of the Steps to Work programme is to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment.

Between September 2008 and June 2012, the latest date for which data is available, 2,850 participants left the Steps to Work programme in the South Antrim Parliamentary Constituency. Of these 2,850 leavers, a total of 1,125 moved into employment. This figure includes those moving into either unsubsidised or subsidised employment. Of the 1,125 who moved to employment, 1,085 moved into unsubsidised employment. This equates to 38% of the total leavers in the South Antrim constituency.

This is 3% above the Northern Ireland average. The percentage of participants who have been successful in obtaining unsubsidised employment, following participation on the Steps to Work programme, ranges from 28% to 43% by Parliamentary Constituency.

From September 2008 to September 2012, 99,720 participants started the Steps to Work programme. Reflecting the increase in unemployment since the recession began in 2008, the number of starts on the programme has increased year on year from 18,020 in 2009/10 to 29,885 in 2011/12.

The current target for Steps to Work participants moving into sustained employment for 13 weeks or more is 25%. The latest statistical data from September 2008 to March 2012 shows that an overall total of 29% was achieved.

Redundancy Advice Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what efforts have been made to put in place a permanent response unit to deal with redundancies such as those at FG Wilson.
(AQO 3423/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Employment Service has in place effective mechanisms for delivering a full redundancy advice service at very short notice.

In offering redundancy advice services, the Employment Service works with the Social Security Agency, further education colleges, HMRC and other agencies. Should any company choose to avail of the service, their employees will receive information and professional advice about the options and support available. These include employment, training and education opportunities, as well as careers, benefits and taxation advice.

It is my assessment that a permanent response unit would simply duplicate the role of the Employment Service redundancy advice service and would therefore not be justified. The service currently provided is already highly effective, in that it has proven itself to be both flexible and highly responsive to local redundancy situations.

For example, in the case of FG Wilson the redundancy service was offered to the company immediately on receipt of the official notice.

A package of tailored support was put together in consultation with the company's HR management and out-placement provider, Lee Hecht Harrison, which included redundancy clinics for three weeks as well as job and training fairs which were free of charge.

It should be noted that the company confirmed that there were no compulsory redundancies.

In total the company announced 750 redundancies in September 2012. The broad skill sets of the redundant staff, based on the information held by the employer was engineers for research and development; engineers; managers, supervisors, administrators; and, manufacturing operators.

In additional to redundancy advice services offered by the Department, Northern Regional College made course places available to a number of those who were being made redundant.

The college is currently finalising a proposal under the Jobs and Economy Initiative to provide more intensive support to individuals.

Further Education: Irish Language Medium

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the work his Department has undertaken to facilitate Further Education being delivered through the medium of the Irish language.
(AQO 3424/11-15)

Dr Farry: All issues relating to curriculum delivery and course provision are a matter for individual further education colleges. Colleges remain prepared to deliver further education courses through the medium of Irish where sufficient demand exists.

In October 2011, following discussions with the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I wrote to the six Further Education colleges, and asked them to consider contributing to the Líofa initiative.

Four colleges – Belfast Metropolitan College, South West College, South Eastern Regional College, and Southern Regional College have listed their mainstream Irish language provision on the Líofa website.

Outside the statutory further education sector, a pilot has been proposed through my Department's Training for Success programme, in order to accommodate a number of learners who have expressed a preference to undertake their vocational training through the medium of Irish. This will be provided through a sub-contracting arrangement between one of my Department's contracted training suppliers and GaelChursaí, which was formed in February 2011 to provide training and, develop employment opportunities within the Irish medium sector.

Such a pilot will allow my Department to test the delivery model. If it proves successful, then consideration will be given to how best to mainstream such a provision within the Training for Success programme delivery.

Unemployment: East Antrim

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he has introduced to address unemployment in East Antrim following the significant local job losses.
(AQO 3425/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to reducing unemployment across Northern Ireland. Carrickfergus and Larne Jobs & Benefits Offices, which serve East Antrim, offer a range of services and programmes to help jobseekers find employment. Services include job search, help with writing a CV or job application form, help to prepare for interviews, careers guidance, or help with travel costs for job interviews.

In addition a range of contracted schemes such as the Steps to Work and Pathways to Work programmes are offered.

My Department has recently introduced new initiatives to help address youth unemployment, which includes provision in East Antrim.

The Youth Employment Scheme is available to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment. Also 'First Start', a new strand of the Steps to Work programme, offers waged employment opportunities for unemployed young people, each lasting a minimum of six months.

Under the Collaboration and Innovation Fund, just under £4 million has been allocated to eight organisations, to help 1,500 unemployed young people from greater Belfast and East Antrim to get into further education, employment or training.

Newtownabbey is also one of the new Community Family Support Programme pilot areas. The programme will help prevent intergenerational unemployment and poverty, in ten of the most disadvantaged local families.

Tomorrow, 19th February, my Department will co-host with Ledcom and Larne Borough Council a Jobs and Opportunities Fair in Larne Town Hall. Over 30 organisations will be present to offer jobs and training opportunities to people in Larne. Employers include P&O, Danske Bank, Price Waterhouse Coopers, ASDA and TESCO offering a diverse range of opportunities in a wide range of sectors.

It is worth noting that in the period April to December 2012 the Employment Service helped 1,250 people find employment in East Antrim; 22% above target for the period.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the cost to Invest NI of each job promoted from California during the period 2009-2012.
(AQW 19251/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI reports on the basis of the amount of assistance offered to promote jobs. The cost to Invest NI to promote these jobs from Californian based companies during the period 2009-2012 was £14,679 each.

The current method of calculating cost per job has been agreed by the Treasury and is

used for delegation and control purposes by the Department of Trade and Industry and all the Development Agencies within the United Kingdom to enable like for like comparisons to be made about the level of assistance being offered to companies.

Crescent Capital Funds

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the investors from outside Northern Ireland in Crescent Capital Funds.
(AQW 19252/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Crescent Capital has managed two venture capital funds.

Crescent Capital I was a £14 million fund which was launched in October 1995 as Hambro Northern Ireland Ventures LP. It was a 10 year limited partnership with a 2 year extension period. The Fund had a broad range of investors from outside Northern Ireland as listed below.

Investors in Crescent Capital I

Partners

- Dutch Nordic Insurance Company NV
- Walsh Strategic Management Limited
- GRE Nominees Ltd
- Investec Group Investments (UK) Limited
- Haverhill Retirement Board, Massachusetts, US.
- Middlesex County Retirement System, Massachusetts, US.
- Pensionskassen for Vaerkstedsfunktionaerer i Jernet, Denmark (PVJ)

- State Registered Nurses and District Nurses Pension Fund, Denmark.
- Marmara Shipping & Trading Inc
- George Moore, Vienna, Virginia, U.S.
- Alex Hambro (re: ex Ulster Garden Villages Trust)
- Ballylumford Power Pension Scheme / Aerion Funds Management London
- Merseyside Superannuation Fund Managers, Liverpool, England
- Lancashire County Pension Fund
- HamNIV GP Limited (1% share of total commitment)

Crescent Capital II LP was established as a £22.5 million fund under a 10 year limited partnership agreement, with the option to extend the fund by 2 years.

The Fund commenced in May 2005 with three private investors from outside Northern Ireland, as listed below.

Investors in Crescent Capital II

Partners

- New York State Pension Fund
- The European Investment Fund
- Martin Naughton

Invest NI

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support has been given to the digital and software industries by Invest NI in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19276/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the amount of assistance offered by Invest NI in each of the last 5 financial years to businesses within the digital and software industries.

Invest NI Assistance Offered to Businesses in the Digital & Software Industries (2007-08 to 2011-12)

Year	Assistance Offered £m
2007-08	16.4
2008-09	17.5
2009-10	29.7
2010-11	19.0
2011-12	15.4
Total	**98.0**

Invest NI

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how additionality and deadweight are taken into account when considering the value for money offered by Invest NI.
(AQW 19367/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI, when assessing the value for money (VfM) of any assisted programme or project, will examine additionality and deadweight. This is a standard feature of the appraisal process and it is a requirement of DFP guidance, which is publicly available on http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/eag.

Invest NI will use a variety of means to probe the information provided by the applicant in respect of additionality and deadweight. This could be through, for example;

- the examination, monitoring and benchmarking of information, including financial and business plan information, supplied by the applicant,
- direct questioning of the applicant on their business plan and the financing of their plans,
- drawing on the knowledge of Invest NI, where it has experience of dealing with similar applications or has had previous dealings with the applicant,
- consulting other organisations who are experienced in the relevant field of activity, or who have previous experience of the applicant - for example, partner organisations, other funding bodies, banks, and so on.

Furthermore Invest NI and/or DETI economists, as appropriate, examine the information and evidence on additionality/ deadweight when an assessment is made of the VfM of Invest NI cases. This should help ensure that Invest NI assisted projects receive the minimum government assistance required to bring them, and their benefits, about.

Invest NI

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the extent to which new jobs created by companies which are supported by Invest NI are counterbalanced by jobs lost since 2008.
(AQW 19372/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Recent research and analysis on job creation carried out by Aston Business School demonstrates the strong performance of Invest NI assisted businesses relative to the rest of the private sector. During the period 2005-2011 Invest NI assisted businesses increase their employment by 17.6% compared to a 7.8% decline in employment by private sector non-assisted businesses.

Whilst this analysis does not specifically relate to the period since 2008, it shows that businesses assisted by Invest NI between 2005 and 2011 created 34,389 jobs. This was offset by some clients reducing their employment by 20,282, resulting in an overall net increase of 14,107 (+17.6%).

Productivity Gap

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of (i) the current productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom; (ii) any trend which is evident as regards the productivity gap; and (iii) her targets for reducing the productivity gap.
(AQW 19373/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Productivity data for UK regions is produced by the Office for National Statistics and this information is publically available, with the latest release published on 3 January 2013 http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/productivity/labour-productivity/q3-2012/stb-lprod-q312.html#tab-Regional-labour-productivity. As highlighted in both the Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP), and more recently the Evidence Base supporting the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy, the lower labour productivity in Northern Ireland is typically a function of relatively low productivity in key sectors and a sectoral mix in the economy with an over-representation of lower value added activities.

(ii) The productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom is longstanding, and economic forecasts published within the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy illustrate the scale of the challenge ahead. IREP recognised that, in the context of regional economic growth, it is important the Executive sufficiently prioritises exports and inward investment and that innovation and R&D are recognised as vital long term drivers of productivity. Committed action over a significant period of time will be required to make significant inroads into the productivity gap.

Although the latest available data suggests that the productivity gap widened during the downturn, 2011 did see some improvement in terms of GVA per filled job – which currently stands at 86.8% of the UK average. The Northern Ireland data is also part of a wider "productivity puzzle" in respect of the productivity data for the UK as a whole, in terms of trends in output, employment and productivity during the downturn. This has recently been analysed in detail by the Office for National Statistics, available to download from http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/the-productivity-conundrum/explanations-and-preliminary-analysis/art-explanations-and-preliminary-analysis.html.

(iii) My Department does not have a target relating to reducing the productivity gap with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Exports

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how export sales are measured.
(AQW 19374/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are two main sources of official statistics on exports for Northern Ireland.

Regional Trade Statistics for all UK regions are published by HMRC on a quarterly basis, and these are publically available from https://www.uktradeinfo.com/statistics/rts/pages/default.aspx.

NISRA publishes a Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey each year which provides estimates of sales within Northern Ireland, external sales to Great Britain and exports generated by all businesses within the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland. The latest figures available are for 2011/12 and can be accessed through the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-manufacturing-sales-exports.htm

The Programme for Government contains commitments on exports, and progress is assessed using the Regional Trade Statistics due to their timeliness and frequency of publication, the enhanced information available on destination countries (which is crucial for the emerging economies target) and also the ability to compare across all UK regions.

Invest NI: Performance Data

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department assesses the quality of Invest NI's performance data.
(AQW 19375/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department's Analytical Services Unit works closely with Invest NI to source and validate its performance data and, only recently, the Unit completed a data linkage project which linked Invest NI data with Business Survey data in an attempt to better understand the performance of Invest NI supported companies. In turn this work, and the outputs from it, was independently validated by Professor Mark Hart of Aston Business School. All this material has been published and is available on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/deti-stats-index-3/sfa-analysis.htm.

This work is currently being built upon through an externally commissioned evaluation of Invest NI's programme of Selective Financial Assistance. This too will be published in due course once it is completed around springtime.

Finally it is also worth noting that the Northern Ireland Audit Office, in its report of March 2012, completed an exercise which assessed the robustness of Invest NI data on the number of FDI jobs promoted during 2010, concluding that they found sufficient evidence to substantiate the jobs figures.

Economic Strategy

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the development of a local economic strategy based on devolution of greater and wider controls over fiscal mechanisms in the way the Scottish Government sought to do through the Calman Commission.
(AQW 19379/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive's Economic Strategy is based on an extensive review of global best practice in economic development and on a wide ranging and independent review of economic policy in Northern Ireland.

The Economic Strategy recognises that securing the ability to vary, and significantly lower, the rate of corporation tax would be a major enabler to successfully rebalance the Northern Ireland economy toward greater private sector and value added growth.

Tourism: Promotion

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the tourist amenities that are being promoted by the Tourist Board; (ii) the marketing budget allocated to promotion; and (iii) the tourism bodies carrying out this work.
(AQW 19402/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) 4,192 tourist amenities are promoted by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on its consumer website discovernorthernireland.com. In 2012 the website received 3.2 million visitors. This data is also further provided as part of a public data feed to Tourism Ireland and is replicated on their new consumer website www.ireland.com. In 2012 Tourism Ireland's consumer website (www.discoverireland.com) received in the region of 12.7 million visitors

(ii) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's promotion & marketing budget for the next 2 years is as follows:

	2013/14: (£)	**2014/15: (£)**	**Total: (£)**
Promotion & Marketing:	7,668,000	7,590,000	15,258,000
European Regional Development Fund:	2,300,000	2,300,000	4,600,000
Total:	**9,968,000**	**9,890,000**	**19,858,000**

[Please note this budget includes all NITB's programme activity including development of the visitor experience, the website and database, quality programmes, visitor servicing and marketing. Tourism Ireland will also have a marketing budget allocated to promotion of the island of Ireland in Great Britain & Overseas.]

(iii) The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is responsible for the promotion of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Tourism Ireland is responsible for the marketing of the Island of Ireland in Great Britain & Overseas.

The following regional tourism partnerships and organisations support their members in providing assistance with tourism product development and in marketing local tourism providers at a regional and international level:

- Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau - www.belfastconventionbureau.com;
- Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Partnership - www.causewaycoastandglens.com;
- Derry Visitor & Convention Bureau - www.derryvisitor.com;
- Fermanagh Lakelands Tourism - www.fermanaghlakelands.com; and
- Flavour of Tyrone - www.flavouroftyrone.com

Further support is provided by local council authorities and industry associations.

Jobs Target

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the impact on the job targets contained in the Programme for Government in light of the latest figures showing that only 75 percent of jobs promoted are actually created.
(AQW 19427/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The job target in the Programme for Government is based on the number of jobs promoted in businesses assisted by Invest NI. Therefore, the conversion ratio between jobs promoted and jobs created will have no impact on this target.

Business Start-ups

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how her Department measures the success of new business start-ups.
(AQW 19431/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The success of local business starts through Invest NI's volume business start programmes are measured through independent Post Programme Evaluations. These Evaluations measure survival rates and employment.

The success of Export Start and Global Start businesses are measured through individual Post Project Evaluations that measure wealth creation (salaries and wages, investment).

Selective Financial Assistance

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Invest NI will utilise the funds currently spent on Selective Financial Assistance should that method no longer be available as a result of regional aid issues.
(AQW 19432/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While the draft Regional Aid Guidelines for the period 2014-20 indicate that the rates of support to business across much of Europe are likely to be reduced by 5% and that support to large companies may be further restricted, it is important to note that Regional Aid will continue across the EU post 2013 and will therefore be available to businesses in Northern Ireland. Given ongoing consultations between EU member states, it is not yet possible to conclude what the direct impact on Northern Ireland will be.

The Executive acknowledges the importance of Regional Aid and SFA to businesses in Northern Ireland. We have made various representations in Whitehall and in Europe and we are in ongoing, active discussions with the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) in London and with representatives of the European Commission with a view to securing the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland post 2013. Therefore Invest NI will continue to make optimum use of SFA throughout the Regional Aid period 2014-20.

During the last five years the amount of SFA offered to businesses has declined from £54 million to £27 million. In 2011-12 SFA accounted for 30% of the total value of assistance offered, compared with 50% in 2007-08. In line with this decrease in SFA spending there has been a large increase in the amount of other forms of assistance offered by Invest NI. This includes a wide range of assistance in support of innovation, trade, skills and other capability development activities which are vital to driving business competitiveness and economic growth in Northern Ireland.

Shale Gas Forum

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the planned work programme for the shale gas forum and the work that has been carried out to date.
(AQW 19436/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Shale Gas Regulators Forum held its inaugural meeting on 18 October 2012. This meeting centred on agreeing the purpose, objectives, Terms of Reference and roles of Forum members and on sharing of knowledge and information to date.

Going forward, the Forum's work programme will be informed by the activities required to give effect to a robust and efficient shale gas regulatory framework.

Shale Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether (i) the Health and Safety Executive will review the report entitled Chief Medical Officer's Recommendations Concerning Shale Gas Development in New Brunswick by Dr. E Cleary; and (ii) she plans to give any consideration to the public health implications of the proposals to extract shale gas.
(AQW 19438/11-15)

Mrs Foster: HSENI will review the Report in relation to issues within its remit, but I should explain that HSENI has no powers with respect to the wider public health matters.

Farm Accidents

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action is being taken to address farming accidents by the Farm Safety Partnership; and how can Health and Safety Training be accessed by farmers.
(AQW 19495/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Farm Safety Partnership has produced a comprehensive action plan listing the actions the members of the partnership will take to address the situation regarding farming accidents. The action plan can be accessed on the HSENI website -

www.hseni.gov.uk/farm_safety_partnership_for_northern_ireland_november_2012-14.pdf

FarmSafe Awareness training can be accessed by contacting either the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (Cookstown) or Ai Services (Newtownabbey) on the following telephone numbers: 0845 026 7536 or 0845 026 7534 or by emailing options@countrysiderural.co.uk Training will initially be delivered on 32 Focus Farms throughout Northern Ireland.

Cattle: Live Export to Libya

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is aware of any live cattle export business opportunities to Libya.
(AQW 19556/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is no certificate in place to allow for the export of live cattle from the UK to Libya. Negotiation of export certificates (EHCS) is undertaken by DEFRA and Industry Partners which include Northern Ireland Representatives.

EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much funding from the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland (2007-2013) has been (i) allocated; and (ii) spent; and to list the recipients.
(AQW 19566/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Of the €306 million (£266 million at euro fx-rate of 1.15) available to Northern Ireland under the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme, £210 million has been allocated to the Programme Implementing Bodies which are Invest NI, NITB, DETI, DARD and DRD.

To date, £106.8 million has been spent and registered on the EU database.

Further information on the projects and activities funded can be obtained from the Programme website (www.eucompni.gov.uk). A full list of the Programme beneficiaries is also available at http://www.eugrants-successes.org

Electricity

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she will take to ensure that there is adequate additional generating capacity for electricity so that there is security of supply for homes and businesses in all weather conditions.
(AQW 19572/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has had a number of meetings with the Regulator and System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) within the context of the SONI All-Island Generation Capacity Statement. These discussions are at an early stage to inform understanding of our respective roles and responsibilities. They will be developed at the appropriate point to examine options that might be required to ensure future adequacy of supply.

My Department is also monitoring developments in relation to options to restore full capacity to the Moyle Interconnector and actions to bring proposals for development of the North/South Interconnector back before the Planning Appeals Committee. Improved interconnection has a vital role to play in relation to long-term security of supply for Northern Ireland.

Electricity: Generators

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the (i) generating capacity of each of the electricity generators; and (ii) capacity limits of each of the interconnectors; and (iii) impact that the proposed closure of older generating capacity under European regulations may have on local supply.
(AQW 19573/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the All-Island Generation Capacity Statement 2013-2022 jointly published by the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) and EirGrid for the Republic of Ireland, on their websites in January 2013. As electricity system operators in their respective jurisdictions, they are responsible for compiling the data you require.

The document can be obtained through the following link:
http://www.soni.ltd.uk/newsstory.asp?news_id=222

My Department has had a number of meetings with the Utility Regulator and SONI within the context of the All-Island Generation Capacity Statement. These discussions included the examination of options that might be required to ensure future adequacy of generation capacity.

Gas Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the gas extension project is being taken forward independently from any consideration of the potential usage of new pipelines by a company engaged in gas extraction; and why she is not giving consideration to recouping any public expenditure by charging a levy on gas extraction companies making use of the proposed gas transmission.
(AQW 19635/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department's analysis in relation to extending the gas network to towns in the West and North-West has not included potential usage of the new pipelines for the conveyance of locally extracted gas, nor any commercial issues which might arise, as work in relation to gas extraction is still at an exploratory stage.

Gas Distribution Network

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the percentage of (i) the greater Belfast area that is connected to the gas distribution network; and (ii) those people with access to the distribution network who are supplied with gas.
(AQW 19636/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Phoenix Natural Gas advises that there are some 330,000 properties within its licensed area and, by the end of 2012, gas had been made available to approximately 296,000 or some 90% of premises.

Phoenix also advise that by the end of 2012, for those with access to the gas network, approximately 159,000 or around 53% of properties had been connected to natural gas.

Petroleum Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 19123/11-15, whether the work programme of the four onshore petroleum licences issued by her Department are part of the terms and conditions of the licences.
(AQW 19638/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW15606/11-15.

Credit Unions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the policies that the Financial Services Authority requires credit unions to have in place before the 30 September 2013; (ii) the assistance her Department has made available to credit unions to ensure such policies are in place; (iii) how this assistance is provided; and (iv) when the required policies are expected to be in place.
(AQW 19822/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Financial Services Authority as UK regulator is best placed to detail the policies that credit unions are required to have in place at any point in time. My Department has made an offer of financial assistance to the Irish League of Credit Unions and the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions to help meet the costs of providing a service to all credit unions that require guidance and assistance on the transitional arrangements.

Economic Strategy

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how the Treasury Total Expenditure on Services Framework is considered in the development of economic strategies.
(AQO 3450/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In developing the NI Economic Strategy, the Executive Sub-Committee on the Economy considered a wide range of information. This included analysis of the extent to which the Executive had allocated funding to support the rebalancing themes identified within the Economic Strategy and comparisons of the level of economic orientated expenditure with other parts of the UK.

A summary of this analysis was contained within the initial consultation on the Executive's Framework for Economic Growth, "Prioirties for Sustainable Growth & Prosperity" which was published in January 2011.

Economic Strategy

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact for the economy of the Environment Minister's intention to change retail policy in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.
(AQO 3451/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not carry out assessments of the economic impact of planning decisions taken by the Environment Minister.

In line with the Economic Strategy, I would encourage all Executive Ministers to take decisions which promote investment in the local economy and which support sustainable job creation and economic growth.

Foreign Direct Investment: West Belfast

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to increase foreign direct investment in West Belfast.
(AQO 3452/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Over the last two financial years Invest NI has facilitated 14 visits by prospective inward investors, in relation to investing in West Belfast.

Last year, Invest NI's CEO Alastair Hamilton and I travelled to the US and met with Caterpillar senior management to specifically discuss the company's future plans in Northern Ireland, securing the 200 new high quality shared services jobs in West Belfast that Minister Farry and I announced last week.

Invest NI holds 190 acres of land in West Belfast and 31 acres are available for further economic development.

Invest NI continues to works closely with stakeholders and both the West Belfast Partnership and Greater Shankill Partnership Boards to review the features and benefits of West Belfast in order to maximise opportunities for future economic growth. In May 2012, Invest NI hosted a stakeholder reception at Belfast Metropolitan College's new e3 facility, as part of its International Overseas Sales Conference which helped Invest NI's overseas representatives to enhance their knowledge and ability to promote the area.

Investment Banquet in the Guildhall, London

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what economic benefits the recent event in the Guildhall, London, hosted by the Honourable Irish Society, may have for the whole of the North West.
(AQO 3453/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During a very well-attended investment banquet, prospective investors to Northern Ireland were presented with highly positive and compelling messages about investing in the region and in particular in the North West. Additionally, a pre-dinner seminar delivered by representatives from the North West was targeted directly at investors interested specifically in the North West.

Potential investment opportunities are multi-sectoral and include technology, engineering, financial services and business services. In particular, I welcome the intention of a private sector company to develop a data centre in the North West.

Teams from Invest NI are actively following up to develop and manage opportunities.

Economic Advisory Group

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the work of the Economic Advisory Group.
(AQO 3454/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Economic Advisory Group has been particularly busy over the previous year. The Group intends to publish its annual report in the coming weeks and this will provide a comprehensive breakdown of the Group's work over the year in addition to its forward work programme.

Of particular interest will be the Group's in-depth analysis of business access to finance within Northern Ireland. A report is currently being finalised on this important matter and I expect to receive the Group's recommendations when we next meet on 5th March 2013.

Invest NI: Jobs Promotion

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the actions she has taken to rectify any regional disparity in the areas in which jobs are promoted and created by Invest NI.
(AQO 3455/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Assistance patterns are demand-led by businesses wishing to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets. While potential investors are specifically offered a range of options for location, including areas of economic and social disadvantage, the ultimate decision regarding location is one for the company. In the case of established businesses, reinvestment patterns will usually be determined by the existing location of the business.

The 2009 Independent Review of Economic Policy noted the importance of allowing companies the scope to locate where they feel they can operate most profitably and as such, it would be inappropriate for Invest NI to seek to force companies to choose one location over another.

Department of the Environment

MOT: Diesel Emissions Test

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Driver and Vehicle Agency has an obligation to carry out a diesel emissions compliance test as part of the MOT; and whether this is being carried out.
(AQW 17811/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): European roadworthiness directive 2009/40 EC requires metered smoke tests to be conducted on heavy goods vehicles, buses and light goods vehicles, and on cars fitted with diesel engines registered on or after 1 January 1980.

From 1 March 2006, the Driver & Vehicle Agency introduced metered smoke testing into the annual tests for all of the required vehicles. However, for health and safety reasons related to the build-up of fumes in test halls, and on the advice of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, metered smoke testing for light goods vehicles and cars was subsequently suspended, and they are now subject to visual inspection for smoke emissions.

Buses and heavy goods vehicles fitted with diesel engines continue to be tested fully in compliance with the relevant European directive.

The re-introduction of fully compliant emissions testing for cars and light goods vehicles is being considered in the context of an ongoing strategic review of vehicle testing arrangements in Northern Ireland.

DOE: Private Office Running Costs

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost of running his Ministerial Private Office in the last financial year.
(AQW 17864/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total cost of running the Ministerial Private Office for 2011-12 was £269,832. This cost includes salary costs of £263,311 as well as general administration costs of £6,521, which covers items such as computer consumables, stationary and telephony costs.

Allotments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many allotment plots there are in each council area.
(AQW 17890/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 11 councils have indicated that they provide allotments and a table of the numbers provided by each council in 2012 is given below. In addition, Antrim Council, Down District Council and Newry & Mourne Council are actively supporting community groups and others to make some provision.

District Council	No. of Allotments 2012	District Council	No. of Allotments 2012
Belfast	178	Newtownabbey	26
Carrickfergus	189	North down	18
Castlereagh	6	Strabane	52
Derry	31	Dungannon and Tyrone	14
Larne	8	Magherafelt	27
Lisburn	53	Total	602

Lead Mines at Conlig

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider providing protection to the lead mines at Conlig area because of their natural beauty and historical significance.
(AQW 17958/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The former lead workings at Whitespots, which is relatively close to Conlig, have been designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) because of its geological importance. Past workings have produced a series of spoil heaps that provide access to mineral rich material which has been brought to the surface as part of the mining process which would otherwise be inaccessible. The spoil heaps contain mineralised rocks with a range of minerals present including some representing the formerly commercially worked metallic ores. This site has the only occurrence in Northern Ireland of the unusual barium zeolite, harmotone.

Built Heritage has long recognised the considerable historic importance of the industrial heritage complex in the townlands of Conlig and Whitespots. Indeed, they were among the first industrial archaeological sites to be given protection through

scheduling in Northern Ireland. Today, five key surviving components of the complex are given protection under Article 3 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995.

Councils: Payment of Invoices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to detail, for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2012, (i) the total number of invoices paid; and (ii) the number of invoices paid within ten working days of receipt, by each council.
(AQW 18186/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total number of invoices paid and the total paid within 10 working days of receipt of the supplier's invoice, by each council, for the period 1 April to 31 December 2012, is detailed in the table below.

Council	Total Invoices Paid (1 Apr to 31 Dec 2012)	Total invoices paid within 10 working days (1 Apr - 31 Dec 2012)
Antrim	7,380	1,196
Ards	9,254	4,979
Armagh	7,817	3,197
Ballymena*	7,738	2,794
Ballymoney	4,453	887
Banbridge	4,748	1,096
Belfast	40,990	17,925
Carrickfergus	4,271	1,006
Castlereagh	7,657	2,835
Coleraine	6,667	1,038
Cookstown	4,211	2,590
Craigavon	9,003	1,776
Derry	15,330	5,728
Down	8,261	679
Dungannon & S Tyrone	4,060	2,445
Fermanagh	7,483	2,724
Larne	3,120	1,133
Limavady	5,241	2,127
Lisburn	9,774	3,396
Magherafelt	4,367	2,495
Moyle	2,552	614
Newry & Mourne	9,048	928
Newtownabbey	12,504	6,332
North Down	8,351	4,259
Omagh	4,101	1,806
Strabane	3,373	1,004
Total	**202,706**	**76,061**

* Based on Calendar Days

I also attach a table showing the percentage breakdown of 10 day prompt payments for the periods 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12 and April – December 2012. Whilst this shows an overall increase, there is still significant room for improvement. I am currently liaising with Councils to ascertain the reasons why the 10 day target is not being achieved, given my view that more can and needs to be done. I will be looking to overcome any specific system limitations, potentially taking these issues forward as an early reform convergence workstream. I will be writing to Council Chief Executives enclosing both tables and encouraging councils that can achieve the 10 day prompt payment target to do so.

District Councils Percentage of invoices paid within 10 Days

Council	2009/2010 %	2010/2011 %	2011/2012 %	Apr-Dec 2012 %
Antrim	12	10	6	16
Ards	10	24	64	54
Armagh	11	17	32	41
Ballymena (1)	10	12	30	36
Ballymoney	6	6	6	20
Banbridge	N/A	6	36	23
Belfast	6	9	47	44
Carrickfergus	14	14	14	24
Castlereagh	N/A	N/A	N/A	37
Coleraine(2)	8	8	7(2)	16
Cookstown	53	61	53	62
Craigavon	4	3	6	20
Derry	26	25	29	37
Down	N/A	N/A	7	8
Dungannon & S Tyrone	30	32	39	60
Fermanagh	N/A	16	32	36
Larne	3	7	18	36
Limavady	12	19	10	41
Lisburn	5	9	15	35
Magherafelt	39	46	39	57
Moyle	16	14	17	24
Newry & Mourne	5-10	5-10	5	10
Newtownabbey(1)	20	22	36	51
North Down	N/A	N/A	63	51
Omagh	33	33	34	44
Strabane	12	12	23	30

(1) Based on calendar days

(2) Based on a sample of 419 invoices

N/A Councils have advised that the information is not available

Wind Turbines

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of Spatial Planning Advice Note: SP12/09 Planning Applications for Wind Turbines Sited Near to Trunk Roads, which is used by the Planning Service and Highways Agency in England; (ii) how this advice could be used by the Planning Service and Roads Service when assessing wind turbine applications considering that with PPS18 and best practice guidance as the only substantive requirement for safe location of turbines and roads is for a turbine setback distance of fall over height plus 10 percent from a road.
(AQW 18279/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Spatial Planning Advice Note: SP12/09 has been prepared by the Highways Agency (an Agency of the Department of Transport) and applies only to trunk roads in England.

For micro and small turbines, the advice note recommends a set-back from the nearest highway boundary equal in distance to their height + 10%. For larger commercial turbines it recommends a set-back distance equal to their height + 50 metres. The advice note also states that this set-back distance may be relaxed subject to the findings of a site specific assessment.

The Best Practice Guidance (BPG) that accompanies Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 18 'Renewable Energy' states that wind turbines should be set back at least fall over distance plus 10% from the edge of any public road. By way of information, the equivalent planning guidance in England is contained in the companion guide to PPS22 'Renewable Energy' which states that it 'may be advisable to achieve a set-back from roads and railways of at least fall over distance in order to achieve maximum safety'.

My colleague, Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, has confirmed that his Department currently uses the guidance available in PPS18 and the accompanying Best Practice Guidance, which it considers to be adequate. He advised me that details of haulage routes, access, etc as part of the Environment Impact Assessment, along with confirmation about de-icing and shadow flicker, if considered necessary, are requested. He also advised that the set-back of fall over distance plus 10% is also applied and that, although this is seldom an issue, it has been used on a few occasions.

I am, therefore, satisfied that the approach in Northern Ireland and the provisions of PPS 18 adequately address road safety issues.

Review of Public Administration: Shadow Councils

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether elections to shadow councils will happen by June 2014; and to outline any discussions he has had with the Northern Ireland Office on the timing of these elections.
(AQW 18481/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In July 2012, I wrote to the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Owen Paterson MP, requesting that the next set of local government elections be brought forward to 2014. He responded agreeing in principle to this approach.

My Department has been in regular contact with the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that the necessary legislation is in place to allow the next set of local government elections to be held in 2014, providing for a shadow period between polling day and the day on which the new council comes fully into operation.

Motorway Service Stations

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment whether the proposed motorway service stations on the M1 and M2 will be permitted to open 24 hours a day; and whether other retail outlets from which motorists could benefit will also be considered along the motorways.
(AQW 18514/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are no planning restrictions or conditions attached to the current planning permissions for motorway service stations on the M2 that would preclude their use on a 24 hour basis. The M1 MSAs are covered by an agreement under Article 40 of the Planning Order 1991. One of the obligations requires the provision of services 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

As regards retail outlets along motorways, a key planning consideration would be the Department's policy as set out in Planning Policy Statement 3 which precludes direct access for any development proposal onto any motorway or high standard dual carriageway with the possible exception of motorway service areas. This policy is intended to protect the integrity and design standards of the motorway system and help ensure that road safety is maintained.

In the case of retail developments proposed near to the motorway system, but not relying on direct access to it, these are determined on their individual merits taking account of retail planning policy, the provisions of the local development plan and other relevant policy and material considerations, including any representations received.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the Planning Appeals Commission Appeal Decision 2011/A0251 paragraph 6; and whether the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan has been, or will be amended to identify and prepare local policies for those stretches of a Protected Route to be subjected to further access restrictions beyond those set out in Policy AMP3, in respect of the A2 Bangor Road.
(AQW 18646/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Planning Appeals Commission in its appeal decision 2011/A0251 accurately stated that while PPS3 makes provisions for development plans, where appropriate, to identify and prepare local policies for those stretches of a Protected Route to be subject to further access restrictions beyond those set out in Policy AMP 3, draft BMAP does not contain any such local policy. The Commission also noted that there was no objection to the draft plan on that basis.

Given that this issue was not raised as an objection to draft BMAP, the Plan will not be amended to include any such policy.

Planning Applications: Environmental Impact Assessments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 18153/11-15, what is the average time taken to determine the need for an environmental impact assessment on a planning application; and how does this compare to the average in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 18656/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Regulations 7 and 10 of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, (the EIA regulations), state that the Department shall make a determination of whether a particular development is EIA development within 4 weeks from the date of receipt of the application or such longer period as may be agreed in writing with the applicant.

Records of the date of when a determination is made as to whether a proposal is EIA development are not recorded on the Department's IT system in such a way as to enable the average time taken to be easily identified. However, the EIA Regulations provide the procedures and timescales to be applied for EIA development.

Pubs: Taxi Service

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what barriers exist to publicans who wish to offer a service that will bring customers home from their licensed premises; and what steps a license holder must take to offer such a service.
(AQW 18900/11-15)

Mr Attwood: If passengers are carried for "hire or reward", the service would be construed as a taxi service. "Hire or reward" means any payment in cash or kind to enable the passenger to use the service. Payments may be direct or indirect, such as part of an entrance charge to an event. Hire or reward still applies regardless of whether any profits are made from payments received. Since the provision of the service would be closely linked to the use of the public house, it is probable that this service would be construed as a hire or reward service.

In order to provide a taxi service, the vehicle would have to be insured, tested and licensed as a taxi. The driver would also require a taxi driver's licence and the operator of the service would require a taxi operator's licence.

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on taxi operator licensing.
(AQW 18980/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Taxi operator licensing was introduced on 1 September 2012 and up to 24 January 2013, 1,908 applications have been received.

A total of 1,712 temporary licences have been issued and, from these, 818 full licences have subsequently been issued. The remainder are being processed as the necessary information is provided by applicants and verified.

Planning Applications: Upper Bann

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the meetings that he has attended since May 2011 regarding planning applications in the Upper Bann constituency that have been submitted to the Planning Service, including (i) the dates of the meetings; and (ii) the appropriate planning references.
(AQW 18988/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since May 2011 I have attended the following meetings for planning applications in the Upper Bann constituency.

Two separate meetings were held on 2 February 2012 and 31 July 2012 to discuss a planning application at Moyallan Road, Portadown, reference Q/2011/0220/O. The processing of this application is ongoing.

A meeting was held on 15 March 2012 to discuss an application for a housing development at Solitude, Lurgan, reference N/2008/0022/F. This application was approved on 30 October 2012.

Advertisement Banner in Hill Street, Newry

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons for the decision to (i) instigate court proceedings against the four Hill Street Traders in Newry for an alleged breach of planning policy; (ii) withdraw the court proceedings; and to outline the planning policy governing the placement of advertising signage in towns, cities and main arterial routes.
(AQW 18989/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) Craigavon Planning Office received a complaint from a member of the public on the 7 September 2012 in relation to an advertisement banner being displayed over Hill Street Newry. Hill Street is in a Conservation Area where stricter controls apply over the type of advertisement which may be displayed. No application had been received for consent to display the advertisement and officials in Craigavon office decided that it should be removed because they considered that it detracted from the appearance of the Conservation Area.

The Department wrote to the four traders on 11 October 2012 advising them of the breach of planning control and seeking removal of the advertisement within 10 days of the letter as it is an offence under Article 84(2) of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. The letters also highlighted the prospect of court action should the sign remain and set out the possible penalties for such a prosecution. One trader replied but gave no indication when the banner would be removed.

A further site inspection was carried out on 25 October 2012 and the advertisement banner remained in place. The Department then proceeded to issue instructions to its solicitors on 19 November 2012 asking them to initiate summons action against the four traders who were advertising on the banner. The summonses were served at the end of January.

(ii) I was alerted to issue by a media query and following discussions with the senior planners officials I have took the decision, with their agreement not to pursue this case and the summonses against the four traders will be withdrawn at the Court hearing on 19 March 2013. The temporary campaign banner was a response by local traders who have a long history of working hard to stimulate economic activity and investment in the historic town centre. Greater weight should therefore be given to the difficult economic conditions experienced by traders, the disruptions in the area while environmental improvements were carried out and the opportunity presented by the completion of the public realm works. I understand that the offending banner has been removed.

My view is that I and my officials should be spending our time going after the worst offenders, be it environmental crime or planning law breaches. I have told senior planners to tell local planners to use common sense and consider these matters in the round before taking formal enforcement action.

(iii) In determining an application for consent to display an advertisement in towns, cities and main arterial routes the Department assesses proposals against Policy AD1 of Planning Policy Statement 17 (PPS17) Control of Outdoor Advertisements and any other relevant planning policies and other material considerations relevant to it depending on the specifics of the site. This includes the relevant Area Plan and in this case guidance for Newry Conservation Area.

Bus Operator Licences: EU Member States

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on international passenger transport following the issuing of guidance in June 2012.
(AQW 19026/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In June 2012 the Department, having obtained extensive legal advice, issued guidance on the licensing requirements to be met by bus operators licensed in another Member State. In providing this guidance I committed that my Department would engage with the European Commission to bring the fullest clarity to this complex area of European law.

The June advice informed operators that a contract for a permanent or frequent or regular service could only be delivered by holders of a Northern Irish operator licence.

The Commission has now provided further advice which has, in turn, been validated by the Department for Transport. The Commission concluded that, depending on the nature of the service, services of up to three year duration could be delivered by an operator licensed in another Member State.

My Department has now issued revised advice and is in the process of informing the industry and all Northern Ireland Departments of the change in position regarding contracting for bus passenger transport.

DVLA Coleraine

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the current position in relation to jobs at the Motor Vehicle Licensing Centre in Coleraine.
(AQW 19109/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am meeting Stephen Hammond, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, on 5 March 2013 to discuss DVLA's proposals for the centralisation of vehicle licensing services in Swansea. At that meeting I intend to continue to make a robust case for the retention of vehicles licensing services, and the associated jobs, in Northern Ireland

Dog Fouling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what fines have been imposed for dog fouling, by each Council, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19192/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department requests information on fixed penalty notices issued by district councils after the end of each financial year. Information on the number of fixed penalty notices issued in the district of each district council in each of the last three financial years in respect of the offence of permitting dogs to foul is set out in the following table.

Council	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Antrim BC	1	0	0
Ards BC	10	8	13
Armagh City & DC	1	2	5
Ballymena BC	6	2	9
Ballymoney BC	0	1	0

Council	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Banbridge DC	2	0	1
Belfast CC	77	160	92
Carrickfergus BC	0	0	3
Castlereagh BC	n/k	0	0
Coleraine BC	40	33	17
Cookstown DC	3	1	0
Craigavon BC	78	50	38
Derry CC	0	1	3
Down DC	12	10	16
Dungannon & South Tyrone BC	0	0	0
Fermanagh DC	0	0	0
Larne BC	9	3	2
Limavady BC	0	1	0
Lisburn CC	0	2	6
Magherafelt DC	0	1	0
Moyle DC	4	2	1
Newry & Mourne DC	1	5	4
Newtownabbey BC	19	33	17
North Down BC	3	6	1
Omagh DC	2	0	1
Strabane DC	n/k	2	2
Totals	**268**	**323**	**231**

Power Lines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the planning guidelines for underground power lines and when he expects them to be next reviewed.
(AQW 19474/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the provisions of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the carrying out by statutory operators of any works for the purpose of inspecting, repairing or renewing any pipes, cables or other apparatus does not constitute development and hence does not require planning permission.

In addition, Part 13, Class C (Electricity Undertakings) of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 provides that, except within a site of special archaeological interest, the laying of underground pipes, cables or any other apparatus by electricity undertakers (and the construction of shafts and tunnels reasonably necessary in connection with such pipes, cables or apparatus) is permitted development and does not require the submission of a planning application.

The Department has no immediate plans to review the current planning legislation for underground cables.

Planning Policy: Access Roads for New Houses

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what is the legal position for a person who wishes to use building rubble in the formation of lanes around newly built houses.
(AQW 19479/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 'Development' as defined by Article 11 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 means the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.

The formation and laying out of accesses to serve new houses is operational development and requires planning permission.

Driving Theory Test

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the hazard response driving test, to detail (i) the pass rate; and (ii) the revenue which has been raised, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19508/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) Pass rates

The Official Statistics on theory test pass rates, from the "Compendium of Key Statistics for the Driver and Vehicle Agency 2011/12", which was published on 21 June 2012, are shown in Table 1 below. The 2012/13 statistics are not yet available and have therefore been excluded. The Compendium for 2012/13 is due for publication in June 2013.

Table 1. Theory Test Pass Rates 2007/08 to 2011/12

Category	2007/08 %	2008/09 %	2009/10 %	2010/11 %	2011/12 %
Private Car	67.6	66.1	64.4	63.4	61.0
Motorcycle	74.2	77.1	80.9	79.5	76.2
LGV*	66.8	68.4	-	-	-
PCV*	76.5	79.6	-	-	-
LGV Hazard Perception*	-	80.6	79.8	82.7	80.0
LGV Multiple Choice*	-	74.3	79.7	78.7	80.0
LGV CPC Module 2***	-	-	68.2	66.3	54.1
LGV CPC Conversion Module 2***	-	-	N/A	100.0	66.7
PCV Hazard Perception*	-	83.9	84.3	83.9	81.7
PCV Multiple Choice*	-	91.3	91.1	84.4	80.6
PCV Module 2**	-	90.6	76.7	69.5	57.0
PCV CPC Conversion Module 2***	-	-	N/A	100.0	66.7

* LGV and PCV tests operated up to 10 March 2009, when they were split into hazard perception and multiple choice tests

** Introduced from 10 September 2008

*** Introduced from 10 September 2009

(ii) Revenue raised

The theory test revenue figures for the last five years, sourced from the published Driver & Vehicle Agency annual accounts, are shown in Table 2 below. The figures are for all categories of theory test. From 2007 to 2009, the theory test categories were car, motorcycle, large goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicle. For 2009 to 2012, the theory test categories are as previously stated, plus driver certificate of professional competence tests. The 2012/13 revenue figures are not yet available and have therefore been excluded.

Table 2. Revenue from theory test fees

2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000
1,476	1,618	1,730	1,710	1,705

0300 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has examined the possibility of changing the 0845 numbers to the new 0300 numbers, as used by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.
(AQW 19526/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning have provided a 0300 number for the public to contact them through NI Direct since January 2012.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) uses 0845 numbers for both its telephone booking facility and customer services enquiry line. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) provides an 0845 number for use by the public as a general contact point.

The DVA telephone booking facility is a contracted out service, with the current contract due for renewal in March 2014, and the Agency intends to consider the option of moving to a 0300 number when the contract is retendered.

Consideration has previously been given to the use of 0300 numbers for the customer services enquiry line. Owing to uncertainty around the future of vehicle licensing services in Northern Ireland, however, a decision has been made to remain with the 0845 number in the meantime.

NIEA has undertaken to consider the comparative costs and benefits of the use of 0845 and 0300 numbers.

Wind Turbines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average time taken in the Eastern Divison to complete the planning process for micro wind turbine applications of 5kw or less.
(AQW 19591/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information provided in planning applications for wind turbines does not always include the output level of the proposed turbine. It is therefore not possible from the information held on the database to provide validated statistical information in relation to this request.

However, if clarification could be provided on the specific District Council Areas the question is referring to and the timeframe the request covers, e.g. 1 year, 5 years etc. information could be provided on the average time taken to complete the planning process for single wind turbines.

Planning Applications: West Tyrone

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment why Planning applications for rural dwellings near wind farms in West Tyrone, which far exceed the 500 metre distance stated in the supplementary guidance, are being refused.
(AQW 19607/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that planning applications for new rural dwellings near wind farms in west Tyrone, which are outside the 500metre distance stated in the supplementary guidance of Planning Policy Statement 18, are not being refused permission because of the impact of the turbines upon the new dwellings. New dwellings in the countryside are however required to comply with the requirements of policy PPS 21, Sustainable development in the Countryside. In some cases permission is refused as proposals do not meet these requirements.

Waste Management Groups

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the current position of the Waste Management Groups.
(AQW 19631/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Much of the detailed information pertaining to the waste infrastructure procurements is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements. However, I can provide the following summary of the current position of each project.

The North West Region Waste Management Group (NWRWMG) procurement is to provide Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) (140,000 tonnes capacity) and a Gasification plant (80,000 tonnes capacity).

At its meeting on 13 December 2012 the Executive agreed the provision of financial support to the NWRWMG to a maximum of £35 million over fourteen years. This commitment would materialise once the proposed waste infrastructure has been constructed and is operational, which NWRWMG has forecast will happen during 2015/16, subject to council ratification.

Following approval of the NWRWMG Appointment Business Case for its project by DOE and DFP, the members of its Joint Committee decided at their meeting on 19 December to recommend the appointment of a Preferred Bidder to deliver new waste infrastructure for the north-west region to their constituent councils for their consideration. That recommendation is currently progressing through the democratic cycle of council meetings.

On 15 October 2012, SWaMP2008 announced the termination of its long-term waste infrastructure procurement following its decision on the basis of legal advice not to contest a challenge to the legality of its bidder consortium. The Department has requested a Post Project Evaluation from SWaMP2008.

The arc21 procurement involves a two stage process with up front Mechanical Biological Treatment (240,000 tonnes capacity) of Municipal Solid Waste to gain additional recyclate and biologically treat the remaining material to produce a fuel for combustion in a second stage conventional Energy from Waste facility (210,000 tonnes capacity).

arc21 advises that it is in the latter stages of dialogue with its remaining bidder and is working through a range of procurement issues, including affordability, land assembly and planning and permitting. It had previously forecast appointment of a Preferred Bidder in February 2013 but does not now expect that to happen until September 2013.

Waste Management Groups

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment when funding for the Waste Management Groups will expire.
(AQW 19632/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All three Waste Management Groups (WMGs) were formally notified in due time that pre-contract financial support under the Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme would cease on 31 March 2013, by which time the three WMGs had previously forecast that they would reach financial close. The WMGs were advised at the same time that they should revert to their constituent councils should they require any additional funding to reach financial close in the event of their incurring further slippage beyond 31 March 2013.

ARC21

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the procurement process for ARC21.
(AQW 19633/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Much of the detailed information pertaining to the waste infrastructure procurements is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements.

The procurement process for the Waste Infrastructure Programme has not changed since the introduction of the Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme in 2008. The procurement process is a competitive dialogue.

arc21 has advised that the procurement involves a two stage process with up front Mechanical Biological Treatment (240,000 tonnes capacity) of Municipal Solid Waste to gain additional recyclate and biologically treat the remaining material to produce a fuel for combustion in a second stage conventional Energy from Waste facility (210,000 tonnes capacity).

arc21 advises that it is in the latter stages of dialogue with its remaining bidder and is working through a range of procurement issues, including affordability, land assembly and planning and permitting. It had previously forecast appointment of a Preferred Bidder in February 2013 but does not now expect that to happen until September 2013.

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department takes against taxi operators who are found not to have a taxi operator licence.
(AQW 19644/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since the introduction of taxi operator licensing on 1 September 2012, my Department's approach has been aimed primarily at raising awareness of the relevant legal requirements and at assisting operators to become compliant. This has been done mainly by the Driver & Vehicle Agency's enforcement staff, who have been undertaking a series of educational visits to taxi depots and carrying out spot checks on vehicles and drivers at the roadside. During premises visits, operators have received information leaflets and copies of the new taxi operator handbook, which details the requirements and the standards the Department expects of licence holders.

These efforts to promote understanding and awareness will continue. However, where there is evidence that an operator is failing to take the necessary steps to meet legal requirements, appropriate enforcement action is being taken, and to date a number of unlicensed operators have been reported with a view to prosecution.

Enforcement officers have now started a further programme of more rigorous compliance audits at taxi operators' premises, and in these cases enforcement notices will be issued, where required, specifying any remedial action to be taken to ensure compliance, and these will be followed up as necessary with appropriate enforcement action. Of course, I have instructed enforcement to be proportionate and to recognise the difficult trading/economic circumstances that prevail.

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment how many people have been prosecuted for operating a taxi without a valid licence, since the introduction of the taxi operator licence.
(AQW 19645/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since the introduction of taxi operator licensing on 1 September 2012, a number of taxi operators have been detected operating without operators' licence. These cases are still to progress through the court system.

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what financial impact the introduction of the taxi operator licence has had on the taxi industry.
(AQW 19646/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Taxi operator licensing was introduced in September 2012. To help taxi operators with the cost of obtaining an operator licence, the initial application fee was discounted from £140 to £40 for all applications received within the first two months of the regulations being introduced.

While licensing costs depend on the number of vehicles affiliated to an operator, the cost to an operator with a single taxi, for example, with a five-year licence, is £63 per year.

Taxi operator licensing is one of a number of measures that I will be introducing to improve safety and accessibility, to raise service standards, to clamp down on illegal taxiing and to enable legitimate taxi operators and drivers to make a living from a re-invigorated taxi industry. This is the approach agreed and adopted by the Assembly in passing Taxi legislation. The

legislation – if implemented in a proper and proportionate way – will see better customer service, better trading opportunities and better prospects for growth and jobs, particularly with tourism potential. That is why the implementation of the legislation is being managed in a phased way, listening to the traders and reducing upfront costs.

Community Transport: Driving Licence Arrangements

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment what changes he is proposing on driving licence arrangements; and what impact these changes will have on drivers who volunteer on community transport programmes.
(AQW 19649/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations (NI) 1996 set out the requirements to be met by volunteer drivers when driving minibuses. My Department is not proposing to make any changes to these Regulations.

My Department is in the process of reviewing the way in which bus operators in Northern Ireland are licensed with a view to creating a modern, fair and safe regime in which bus services are delivered. This will not change the driving licence requirements for volunteer drivers who will be able to continue to volunteer on community transport programmes.

DVLA Coleraine

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to protect Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority jobs in Coleraine.
(AQW 19678/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since June 2011, I have been lobbying Ministers at Westminster about the current threat to jobs in Coleraine arising from the proposals by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for the centralisation of vehicle licensing services in Swansea, and encouraging public representatives from right across the political spectrum to do likewise. I have made the argument for the retention of jobs on an consistent basis, preparing and presenting a dossier to London on the reasons why jobs should be retained (etc.).

I shall also be meeting with Stephen Hammond, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, in London on 5 March 2013 to discuss the matter further, and at that meeting I intend to again make the case for the retention of vehicle licensing services, and the associated jobs, in Northern Ireland.

Historic Monuments in County Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to list the buildings, monuments or structures in County Tyrone which are under public care; (ii) to detail the annual budget allocated to maintaining these structures; and (iii) to outline the criteria for inclusion on this list.
(AQW 19692/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Details of each element of your question are laid out in the attached Annexes, and provide the current overview of information held by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), within this Department, in respect buildings, monuments or structures that are described and managed as historic monuments in County Tyrone.

The NIEA holds primary records for those historic monuments that it owns or manages in the County. These are often described as ‘State Care Monuments’. NIEA also has details about ownership of sites, not in its ownership or management, but which have been protected as Scheduled Monuments. Some of these are in the ownership of local councils, and in that context they could be described as being in public care. A list of all State Care Monuments managed by the Department of the Environment, and an indicative list of Scheduled Monuments in the ownership of local councils in Tyrone, is attached at Annex 1. There are likely to be many more historic monuments in the county that are owned or managed by other government departments, agencies or the local authorities. However, unless these sites have special statutory protections, we cannot say how many, overall, are in public care. Further, as we do not have the full extent of other departments’ or agencies’ landholdings, we cannot give a definitive list of, for example, those historic monuments that are on land presently used by Forrest Service or local schools.

Costs associated with the maintenance of these sites are usually allocated according to conservation and maintenance need; there is no fixed budget for sites in County Tyrone, and the conservation and maintenance need is considered against the other sites across the North. Routine costs associated with the management of State Care Monuments are usually split between two functional units in the NIEA. Over the past three years, an average of approximately £13k has been spent on the routine management (litter collection, maintenance of boundaries), spread across the 44 State Care Monuments in Tyrone. Not every site has required expenditure, and the condition of the sites is monitored by staff through routine site inspection. During the current financial year we have undertaken conservation work, through our craft workforce, at Benburb Castle, Castle Caulfield, Newtownstewart Castle and Mountjoy Castle. The works at these sites variously related to increasing public access, addressing health and safety concerns, and establishing future conservation needs.

At present there is no active programme of selection of sites to be brought into public ownership and presentation. Non-statutory criteria for the identification of sites for special statutory protection as Scheduled Monuments have been published as Annex B of Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage. Attached to Annex 2 of this letter is an overview of the process by which some of our most important monuments have come into State care. As you will see, over

the past 140 years or so, this department has accumulated a significant number of historic monuments for a wide variety of reasons.

Looking forward, I have asked officials to progress the development of proposals for the future presentation of one of the most important historic monuments in the North of Ireland: Tullaghoge Fort. Work is currently under way to complete a significant transfer of land at Tullaghoge from the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development to the Department of the Environment. In partnership with the local council, we are looking forward to presenting this hidden jewel to the wider public. This site has the potential to be a key 'heritage hub' in Mid-Ulster, and is of great significant in the history of these islands. The lands involved comprise a mix of open pasture and historic woodland, as well as the Fort itself. Planning is at an early stage, but there is an obvious need at this site for improved visitor infrastructure. I have been advised by officials that emerging findings from a new feasibility assessment of the site should become available in April 2013.

Annex 1
State Care Monuments in County Tyrone

Name	Townland	Sites and Monuments Record Number	Irish Grid Reference
Balix Lower Court Tomb: The White Rocks	Balix Lower	TYR 006:006	H48369635
Ballywholan Dual Court Tomb: Carnagat	Ballywholan	TYR 065:002	H56974702
Ballywholan Portal Tomb: Carnfadrig	Ballywholan	TYR 065:003	H55554899
Beaghmore Stone Circles, Cairns and Alignments	Beaghmore	TYR 020:004	H68468424
Berrysfort Standing Stone	Berrysfort	TYR 016:046	H27198382
Churchtown Wedge Tomb: Todd's Den	Churchtown	TYR 016:017	H26858567
Churchtown Portal Tomb: Druid's Altar	Churchtown	TYR 016:018	H26658530
Clogher Hillfort: Rathmore	Clogher Demesne	TYR 058:033	H53875133
Copney Stone Circles	Copney	TYR 027:033	H599780
Cregganconroe Court Tomb	Cregganconroe	TYR 037:012	H66227575
Creggandevesky Court Tomb	Creggandevesky	TYR 037:014	H64607500
Damhcloy Megalithic Structure	Crockatanty	TYR 019:019	H59558806
Glenknock or Cloghogle Portal Tomb: Druid's Altar	Glenknock or Cloghohogle	TYR 017:009	H41098796
Grange Standing Stone	Grange	TYR 039:020	H83177477
Grange Standing Stone Pair	Grange	TYR 039:021	H83077514
Killucan Wedge Tomb: Carnanbane	Killucan	TYR 028:006	H68337924
Killucan Long Cairn: Killucan	Killucan	TYR 028:008	H68488012
Knockmany Passage Tomb: Annia's Cove	Knockmany	TYR 059:001	H54695590
Lisky Court Tomb: Giant's Grave	Lisky	TYR 010:006	H35719051
Tattykeel Standing Stone	Tattykeel	TYR 029:022	H74807738
Ardboe Cross and Abbey	Farsnagh; Sessia	TYR 040:003,5	H96677566
Donaghmore Cross	Donaghmore	TYR 046:011	H76886538
Drumgormal Bivallate Rath	Drumgormal	TYR 047:006	H87356984
Dungororan Rath	Dungororan	TYR 046:016	H73876932
Errigal Keerogue Cross and Church	Gort	TYR 059:006	H58545705
Killyliss Rath	Killyliss	TYR 054:004	H75706055
Tullaghoge Fort	Ballymully Glebe	TYR 038:016	H82507430
Harry Avery's Castle	Upper Or New Deerpark	TYR 017:012	H39148522
Magheraglass Church	Magheraglass	TYR 038:001	H74377677

Name	Townland	Sites and Monuments Record Number	Irish Grid Reference
Mountjoy Castle	Magheralamfield, Mountjoy	TYR 047:002	H90116869
Benburb or Wingfield's Castle	Benburb	TYR 061:002	H81475199
Castle Caulfield	Lisnamonaghan, Castlecaufield	TYR 054:001	H75516259
Derryloran Church	Glebe	TYR 038:019	H80427680
Moy Gates and Screen	Moy	TYR 062:009	H85105606
Newtownstewart Castle	Newtownstewart	TYR 017:047	H40208583
Reaskcor Tree-Ring	Reaskcor	TYR 054:002	H74906160
Reaskmore Penal Altar Site	Reaskmore	TYR 054:029	H75405865
Relignaman Women's Graveyard	Carrickmore	TYR 036:022	H60647222
Roughan Castle	Roughan	TYR 046:002	H82316826
Carricknahaltora	Ballywholan	TYR 065:001	H57804547

Indicative List of Scheduled Monuments in Council Ownership

Council	SMR No.	Site Name	Type	Townland	Grid Ref.
Cookstown D.C.	TYR 039:044	Glebe or Ballyclog Old Church	Church and Graveyard	Glebe	H8660073690
Cookstown D.C.	TYR 029:003	-	Platform Rath	Gortalowry	H8086077370
Cookstown D.C.	TYR 038:047	-	Bronze Age Settlement and Ring Ditch	Loughry	H8139374989
Dungannon & South Tyrone B.C.	TYR 054:017	Dungannon Castle or O'Neill's Castle	Castle and House	Drumcoo (Dungannon)	H7990062620
Dungannon & South Tyrone B.C.	TYR 060:012	Carnteel Church	Medieval Parish Church and Graveyard, also site of 13th century battle	Carnteel	H6943054600
Dungannon & South Tyrone B.C.	TYR 060:016	Aghaloo Church	Medieval Church and Graveyard	Rousky	H6633054930
Omagh D.C.	TYR 033:011	Holywell Church	Church, Graveyard and Carved Stone	Lackagh	H3132074250
Omagh D.C.	TYR 050:021	-	Church	Dromore	H3490062750
Omagh D.C.	TYR 051:035	-	Church ruins and Graveyard	Castletown	H4447061430
Omagh D.C.	TYR 026:002	Cappagh Church or Old Church	Church and Graveyard	Dunmullan	H4493080210
Omagh D.C.	TYR 043:036	-	Church and Graveyard	Drumragh (Caldwell)	H4568069800
Strabane D.C.	TYR 005:500	Strabane Canal	Canal	Various	C3594003910
Strabane D.C.	TYR 016:016	Castlederg Castle	Fortified House and Bawn	Castlesessagh	H2605084420

Council	SMR No.	Site Name	Type	Townland	Grid Ref.
Strabane D.C.	TYR 009:004	Ernaide	Monastery, Church, Graveyard and Cross-carved Stone	Urney Glebe	H3034094910
Strabane D.C.	TYR 017:011	Pigeon Hill	Castle Site (Mound and Foundation)	Croshballinree	H4037085770
Strabane D.C.	TYR 018:012	Corick Abbey	Fransciscan Abbey and Graveyard	Corickmore	H4519088170

Annex 2

Overview of how buildings, monuments or structures are brought into public care as State Care Monuments

A State Care Monument is a site of archaeological interest under the management of the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), as per Articles 13 to 18 of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. This management can be by virtue of direct ownership or lease of a site or through guardianship, whereby the owner retains tenure but site management is under the control of the Department for public benefit.

There are 189 individual and groups of State Care Monuments in Northern Ireland, of which 40 are located in County Tyrone.

The first monuments were acquired by the State after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 when a number of ecclesiastical structures in a ruinous state but worthy of preservation were place under Government protection in 1880. Subsequently, the majority of State Care Monuments in Northern Ireland have been placed under State management or ownership by virtue of a succession of historic monuments legislation, from Ancient Monuments Protection Act, 1882 through to the current Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. These acquisitions have been through purchase, gift, lease or guardianship agreements.

A significant number of monuments were acquired as a result of major administrative change in the early 1970's. As the county councils were abolished, 44 monuments were statutorily transferred from the county councils to State ownership by the Historic Monument (Transfer) Order (Northern Ireland) 1973. Most of these sites lacked a defined boundary and had no public access arrangements at the time of the transfer and have posed considerable issues to the Department of the Environment and its predecessors since their acquisition. County Tyrone contained a disproportionately high number of such monuments with 20 of the 44 transferred monuments located within the county.

The criteria for future acquisition have not been revisited for some time. Earlier criteria for acquisition of additional State Care Monuments has been discussed, and agreed, in several policy papers presented to the Historic Monuments Council the most recent of which was presented to the Environment and Heritage Service Board in 1998 and were identified as:

- **Quality** – the significance, interest and complexity of the site.
- **Period** – all of the major archaeological and historical epochs require representation. Some periods have fewer monuments, so rarity becomes a factor.
- **Type** – clearly the collection of sites in State Care should contain representatives of most known types of historic monuments. Again, rarity can be a factor.
- **Geographical spread** – we endeavour to maintain a roughly even geographical spread of state Care Monuments throughout Northern Ireland. This is not easy to achieve because some areas have few monuments while others have a wealth of known remains. There are distinct concentrations of some types of monuments in Northern Ireland, with distributions determined by historic, environmental and other reasons.

The Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate, published in 2012 by the Department of the Environment, is currently being rolled out and Departments are required to provide a list of all their heritage assets by June 2013.

Non-farming Rural Dwellers

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department is making it easier for non-farming rural dwellers to build a home and live in the countryside.
(AQW 19700/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The policies that accommodate non-farming rural dwellers who wish to build a home and live in the countryside are contained in Planning Policy Statement 21 which deals with sustainable development in the countryside. It contains considerable development opportunities for non-farmers by providing opportunities for:

- replacement dwellings;
- the conversion and reuse of non-residential buildings as dwellings;
- new dwellings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings;

- social and affordable housing schemes;
- development within designated Dispersed Rural Communities; and
- a dwelling to meet compelling personal and domestic circumstances

You will also be aware of my on-going review into the operation of PPS21. Whilst not a fundamental review of its policies, I have been considering the impact of the policy on all those seeking to build a home and live in the countryside, including non-farming families.

In recognition of the continued interest in this issue I met with former members of the Independent Working Group established by the previous Executive to examine the issue of non-farming rural dwellers. I have also met with MLAs, the Ulster Farmers Union, the DARD Minister, rural interest groups and others. The range of views expressed to me to date has been taken into account in considering how PPS 21 is working in practice.

The review into the operation of PPS21 has been lengthy. This has been by design. The reason for this is to 'in real time' and 'in the real world' identify where there were inconsistencies of interpretation or a proper need for flexibility of interpretation. This means that the review has been a working rolling review to aid better practice.

I remain committed to making a statement to the Assembly with the conclusions of the operational review to date. However, I also intend to continue to keep the operation of PPS21 under review going forward. This approach – ongoing review, pre-assessment of applications, training to ensure consistency, proper interpretation to enable proper development – all contribute to the widely agreed view that PPS21 is working better today than 18 months ago.

Recycling: Unusable Material

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment whether any study comparable to the Quality Action Plan which was conducted by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in respect of the amount of collected recycling material which is unusable, has been conducted in Northern Ireland; and with what result.
(AQW 19725/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Defra Quality Action Plan sets out measures aimed to support a market environment which is capable of promoting high quality recycling and delivering recyclates of sufficient quality to meet the standards of the relevant recycling sectors.

In Northern Ireland we intend to consult on a range of actions to improve and maintain the quality of recyclable materials collected, sorted and presented to the market through a Materials Recycling Facilities (MRF) Code of Practice. There will be proposals to address contamination at the point of collection, introduce mandatory and transparent material quality sampling, carry out a benchmarking exercise on the quality of source segregated materials and introduce a recyclate quality grading system.

The Department acknowledges that the introduction of these new measures would, in particular, have implications for the operators of MRFs, and accordingly a partial Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment will be completed. Stakeholder comments will also be invited.

Even though this is a plan for Northern Ireland we will be working within the same EU legislative framework as England, Wales and Scotland who are responsible for their own waste policies and delivery. However, all four administrations work closely together on the issue of quality and we will take forward this policy in partnership with them.

Driving Test

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment to outline (i) the planned changes to the driving test in 2013; and (ii) the rationale for these changes.
(AQW 19734/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has already made changes to the driving test this year through the transposition of the 3rd EU Directive on driving licences (Directive 2006/126/EC) into Northern Ireland law on 19 January 2013. The Directive, which is intended to harmonise common standards for driver training, testing and licensing regimes across the EU, introduced changes to training and testing and the various licence categories for motorcycles and mopeds. In addition to changes affecting motorcycles and mopeds the minimum age for non-professional bus drivers was increased from 21 to 24 and changes were made to the rules around the maximum weights of trailers allowed to be towed by cars and small vans.

Further changes are planned, arising from Directive 2012/36/EU (the Amending Directive), which must be implemented by 31 December 2013. Currently, all vehicles used for driving tests must meet minimum standards, commonly known as "minimum test vehicle standards" which are set out in European and UK legislation. The Directive makes changes to those standards for motorcycles, lorries and buses.

While I have no further plans to make changes to the driving test in 2013, I do intend to introduce a Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly, subject to Executive agreement, by April this year which will have implications for training and testing next year.

The Bill will include the planned introduction of a system of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), affecting new drivers, which will include changes to driver training and testing and the way drivers gain experience once they pass their practical test. The rationale for these changes is to reduce the rate at which new drivers, particularly young new drivers, are killed and seriously

injured, and at which they kill and seriously injure other road users. Depending on legislative progress, operational changes will begin to be seen around April 2014.

The GDL measures include:

- Reducing the age at which young people can start to learn to drive or ride (i.e. obtain a provisional licence) from 17 years of age to 16½.
- Introducing a mandatory 12 month minimum learning period.
- Requiring completion of a 'Learning to Drive' syllabus evidenced by a compulsory student logbook.
- Removing the 45mph speed restriction on learner and restricted drivers and riders, allowing changes to be made to the driving test to include driving on a wider range of roads at up to the posted limits.
- Allowing learner drivers to take lessons on motorways.
- Introducing restrictions on carrying passengers in the six months after a young new driver has passed the test and received a full licence.
- Replacing the current 12 month restricted period by a two year 'new driver' period, during which the new young driver will be subject to a lower drink drive limit and, under the New Drivers Order, will continue to risk revocation of their licence if they accumulate six or more penalty points.
- Replacing R plates by N (for 'New' driver/rider) plates which will have to be carried for two years.
- Introducing remedial courses for new drivers at risk of having their licence revoked because they have accumulated six or more penalty points.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Carlingford Lough Bridge

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in regard to the proposed expenditure of Interreg funds for a bridge over Carlingford Lough, whether (i) the lough is a navigable tidal waterway; (ii) it is used by fishermen to access the mussel beds that lie on the Northern Ireland side; (iii) the proposed bridge will obstruct existing access for fishermen, by virtue of the design of the bridge and it only being capable of opening on 48 hours notice; (iv) the Lough's ancient navigable status will be diminished; (v) any such interference with ancient navigable status requires extinguishment or alteration by statute; and (vi) the necessary legislative steps have been taken, to make lawful the development of a bridge which obstructs a navigable tidal waterway.
(AQW 17378/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): (i)the Newry River, in the vicinity of the proposed bridge, is understood to be a navigable tidal waterway.

(ii) Mussel beds have been accessed by fishermen on a very ad hoc basis when a worthwhile yield could be obtained. This depends on natural spat fall and environmental conditions. The Mussels (Prohibition of Fishing) Regulations (NI) 2013 came into operation on 8th February 2013. The Regulations revoke and re-enact with amendments, the Mussels (Prohibition of Fishing) Regulations (NI) 1999 and provide DARD with a mechanism to manage and regulate the exploitation of the local mussel seed resource. It shall be an offence to fish for or have on board mussels, otherwise than for direct human consumption, except under the authority of a fish culture licence or a permit granted under sections 11and 14 respectively of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 or a seed mussel licence granted under section 4 of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1967.

(iii) Fishing vessels known as 'half-deckers' have fished for mussels in Carlingford Lough. Access to fisheries should be a consideration in design and operation of a proposed bridge.

(iv) & (v) An opening section in the proposed bridge would provide a 20 metre wide channel through which vessels may pass without an overhead obstruction when the bridge is closed to road traffic and open for navigation, otherwise the bridge will introduce an overhead obstruction to navigation. Appropriate arrangements, for example a notice period would be required in relation to opening the bridge for navigation.

As a general principle, obstruction or extinguishment of public rights of navigation requires legislation. The extent, to which any public rights of navigation in Northern Ireland may be obstructed, by the proposed bridge, is being taken account of as part of a detailed consideration of the proposed design.

(vi)Where a person other than DRD proposes to construct a bridge over navigable waters in circumstances to which Article 4 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 applies, DRD must seek to make an Order under that Order and in accordance with Schedule 8 to the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

Civil Law Reform

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what new legislation is planned under civil law reform.
(AQW 19407/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am assuming that the reference is to primary legislation which my Department will be bringing forward, rather than to general civil law initiatives.

At present work is ongoing on two Bills. One which will deal with legal complaints and regulation and the other which will give effect to the Northern Ireland Law Commission's recommendations with regard to the reform of land law.

Cancer Deaths

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many deaths in 2011 had a primary cause of (i) breast cancer; and (ii) prostate cancer.
(AQW 19648/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In Northern Ireland in 2011, there were 342 deaths registered where the primary cause of death was malignant neoplasm of the breast.1

In Northern Ireland in 2011, there were 233 deaths registered where the primary cause of death was malignant neoplasm of the prostate.2

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code C50

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code C61

Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the rationale for the establishment of the Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee, particularly in relation to monitoring the effectiveness and quality of the implementation of the programme.
(AQW 19651/11-15)

Mr Wilson: EU Regulations require the establishment of Monitoring Committees to oversee the implementation of Structural Fund Programmes.

The role of the Monitoring Committee in relation to monitoring the effectiveness and quality of programme implementation derives from Articles 65 and 66 of Regulation EC (No) 1083/2006.

Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel who is the Chairperson of the Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee; and whether there was a conflict of interest identified in relation to monitoring the effectiveness and quality of the implementation of the programme.
(AQW 19652/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The PEACE III Programme Monitoring Committee is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the programme's Managing Authority.

This arrangement is in line with Article 64 of European Council Regulation EC (No) 1083/2006, which states that the Monitoring Committee shall be chaired by a representative of the Member State or the Managing Authority, and does not constitute a conflict of interest. The role of the Chair is primarily to act as a facilitator for committee business.

It is the role of the Monitoring Committee to satisfy itself as to the effectiveness and quality of programme implementation. The Committee operates on a principle of partnership with members drawn from a wide range of sectoral interests. Membership includes representatives from the two Member States, local government, business, trade unions, and the voluntary and community, agri-rural, environment and equality sectors.

Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to identify the members of the Peace III Programme Monitoring Committee.
(AQW 19653/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current membership of the PEACE III Programme Monitoring Committee is detailed in the table overleaf. Nominating organisations are also shown.

Category	Organisations	Nominating Body	Member	Deputy
Chair	Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)	SEUPB	Pat Colgan	Shaun Henry

Category	Organisations	Nominating Body	Member	Deputy
Member State Representatives	UK	Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP)	Maura Young	Steve Clements
	Ireland	Department of Finance (DOF)	Gearoid O'Keeffe	Catherine Clynes
Regional/Sub-Regional/Local Government interests	Northern Ireland	NILGA	Cllr Charlie Casey (Sinn Fein)	Cllr Thomas O'Connor (Sinn Fein)
			Cllr Lee Reynolds (DUP)	Cllr Gareth McKee (DUP)
			Cllr Sammy Brush (DUP)	Cllr Jenny Palmer (DUP)
			Cllr Mervyn Jones (Alliance)	Cllr John Mathews (Alliance)
	Ireland	Border Regional Authority	Caroline Brady	Olive Hannigan
			Cllr Andrew Boylan	Cllr Danny Brady
		BMW Regional Assembly	Gerry Finn	Kieran Moylan
			Cllr James Daley	Cllr Terry Brennan
Cross Cutting Interests	Equality Organisations	The Equality Authority	Carol Baxter	Cathal Kelly
		The Equality Commission	No nomination has been made	Louise Conlon
	Environmental Organisations	Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)	John Anderson	Peter Archdale
Social & Economic Partners	Voluntary and Community Sector	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)	Cyril Moorhead	No nomination has been made
	Business	Joint Business Council (JBC)	Denis Galway OBE	Reg McCabe
			Brian Callanan (IBEC/CBI)	
	Trade Unions	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Teri Cregan (SIPTU)	Clare Moore
			Pamela Dooley	
			(UNISON)	
	Agriculture & Rural Development & Fisheries	Rural Development Council (RDC)	Michael Hughes	Teresa Canavan
		Irish Rural Link	Martin Smyth	No nomination has been made
Certifying Authority		SEUPB	Gina McIntyre	Andrew Walker

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Inheritance Tax

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of inheritance tax within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19665/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No. As stated in Annex B of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, actual outturns for inheritance tax raised in Northern Ireland are produced by HMRC and therefore no estimation is required. Likewise, HMRC also publish this figure for Scotland.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Stamp Duty

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of stamp duty within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19666/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No

Net Fiscal Balance Report: National Insurance Contributions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of National Insurance contributions within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19668/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Net Fiscal Balance report, the methodology applied is generally consistent with that designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) report, however, there are some instances where there are minor technical variations in how certain specific elements of the individual estimates are derived.

My previous response to AQW 18239/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK national insurance contributions revenue - which is estimated in line with the approach adopted in the GERS report.

There is a very minor technical difference with respect to the national insurance contributions (NICs) revenue estimate. Both NI's and Scotland's share is obtained from a sample of HMRC national insurance data. However, HMRC provides an overall estimate of NI's share, whereas the Scottish estimate is disaggregated by NICs employee and employer class.

I would re-iterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution. At an aggregate level the minor technical variations referred to above are not considered to have any material bearing on the Northern Ireland's net fiscal balance position.

NICS: Business Travel

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail in relation to a part-funded government post, which includes extensive travel in which mileage has been paid at 40p per mile, (i) why there is a threshold of 10000 miles at 40p after which all mileage is taxed; (ii) whether this constitutes discrimination, either directly or indirectly, of PAYE employees due to the nature of their job entailing extensive mileage to complete their job; and (iii) whether such employees are expected to cover the additional cost at their own expense.
(AQW 19669/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The NICS policy relating to expenses is applicable to NICS staff only and all reimbursement of business mileage is in accordance with HMRC rules. Reimbursement to non NICS staff of business mileage is a matter for the respective employing organisation(s).

(i) The NICS policy to reimburse business travel at 45p per mile up to the 10,000 mile threshold in any financial year is in line with HMRC guidance. Reimbursement of all business mileage above the 10,000 mile threshold is payable at 25p per mile. All payments are non taxable.

(ii) I am unable to comment on this as the NICS follows HMRC guidance.

(iii) If due to the application of the rules, officers can demonstrate that they are seriously out of pocket, consideration will be given to payment of actual vouched expenditure.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: VAT

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of VAT within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19696/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in the Net Fiscal Balance report, the methodology applied is generally consistent with that designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland (GERS) report, however, there are some instances where there are minor technical variations in how certain specific elements of the individual estimates are derived.

My previous response to AQW 18240/11-15 outlined the methodology used to estimate NI's share of UK VAT revenue - which is estimated in line with the approach adopted in the GERS report.

There is a minor technical difference with respect to the VAT refunds element of the overall VAT revenue estimate, where my department's report apportions this on the basis of NI's share of UK household VAT expenditure. GERS apportions VAT refunds mainly on the basis of Scotland's share of UK government expenditure on certain VAT-refundable elements of expenditure.

I would re-iterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution. At an aggregate level the minor technical variations referred to above are not considered to have any material bearing on the Northern Ireland's net fiscal balance position.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Tobacco Duty

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of tobacco duty within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19697/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Alcohol Duty

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of alcohol duty within the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used within the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19698/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No.

Narrow Water Bridge

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for her assessment of the impact of the construction of the Narrow Water bridge for the economy and tourism sector in South Down.
(AQO 3446/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Narrow Water Bridge project is primarily an infrastructure project with the aims of enhancing connectivity and a reduction in travel times. Tourism benefits associated with the project are deemed secondary.

The project is currently being critically reviewed by DFP and all benefits associated with the project will be considered in this process.

NICS: Redundancies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants who have (i) been made redundant; and (ii) involuntarily lost their jobs in each year since the implementation of the 2011-15 budget.
(AQW 19713/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of civil servants who have (i) been made redundant; and (ii) involuntarily lost their jobs in each year since the implementation of the 2011- 15 budget is provided in the table below:

	2011/12	2012 – to date
(i) number made redundant (voluntary)	151	137
(ii) number involuntarily lost their jobs (compulsory)	Nil	Nil

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Betting and Gambling Duty

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of betting and gambling duty in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19717/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Air Passenger Duty

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of Air Passenger Duty in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19718/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No.

Net Fiscal Balance Report: Insurance Premium Tax

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there are any distinctions between the methodology employed by his officials to identify the out-turn of the proportion of Insurance Premium Tax in the Net Fiscal Balance Report published in November 2012 and the new Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland methodology used in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland report published in 2012.
(AQW 19719/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No.

Cross-border Co-operation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to publish the paper he referred to in the Estimates debate on 11 February 2012 which shows that cross-border co-operation is costing Northern Ireland £11.2m per annum.
(AQW 19724/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I commissioned, as part of ongoing Budget Review Group work, an assessment of the costs and benefits accruing from cross-border co-operation. The summary of this work which concluded in July 2012 has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Redundancies: East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many confirmed redundancies there were in East Belfast in 2012.
(AQW 19766/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Table 1 below details the number of confirmed redundancies in the Belfast East Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and Northern Ireland as a whole in 2012.

Please note that under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (amended 8 October 2006) companies are only legally required to provide notification of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Also, redundancies do not necessarily equate to job losses, for example, employees who do not qualify for a redundancy package, those on temporary contracts, will not be incorporated into the redundancy figures.

Table 1: Confirmed Redundancies for Belfast East PCA and N. Ireland in 2012

	2012*
Belfast East PCA	110
NI Total	3,349

* Total Confirmed redundancies notified to DFP Economic and Labour Market Statistics Research Branch to 14th February 2013 and this figure may be revised at a future date.

DFP: Whistleblowing Arrangements

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what policies are in place to deal with allegations of impropriety made by whistle blowers; and (ii) what forensic audit techniques are in place to ensure investigations are thorough and conclusive.
(AQW 19771/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In line with good practice, my Department has whistleblowing arrangements in place which can be used to raise concerns about alleged wrongdoing or malpractice of any kind in a safe and acceptable way.

The arrangements together with the DFP Whistleblowing Policy are available on the departmental website setting out the principles of safety, confidentiality and anonymity together with the procedures and key contacts for reporting matters of concern and how the Department will deal with whistleblowing allegations.

Depending on the nature of any concerns raised, the DFP Anti-Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan may be invoked. This includes the scope for formal investigation and the use of Forensic Accountants/Engineers. In the event of forensic audit techniques being required, DFP will assess the nature of the incident, consider the internal capabilities available and supplement with external expertise as necessary.

Small Business Rate Relief

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many companies have (i) applied for; and (ii) been granted small businesses rate relief in North Down since the scheme began.
(AQW 19800/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no application procedure for Small Business Rate Relief. Relief is applied automatically by Land & Property Services to all businesses that qualify.

Information on the number of companies that have been granted Small Business Rate Relief since the scheme began is not available at constituency level as data is collated at district council and ward level only. As at 31st January 2013, 1,168 non-domestic properties within the Ards Council area and 941 non-domestic properties within the North Down Council area have benefited from Small Business Rate Relief since the scheme commenced in April 2010.

Teachers: Principles and Vice-principals Redundancy Scheme

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has received an outline case from the Department of Education regarding a proposed redundancy or enhancement package for Vice-Principals and Principals.
(AQW 19843/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To date, my department has not received an outline case from the Department of Education regarding a proposed redundancy or enhancement package for Vice-Principals and Principals.

Departmental Limit on Expenditure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the current limit in expenditure by a Department on (i) capital; and (ii) revenue expenditure before monies have to be surrendered to a Monitoring Round for re-allocation.
(AQW 19868/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Departments are required to surrender reduced requirements for reallocation through the Executive's monitoring rounds. Reduced requirements are amounts arising from issues such as increased receipts (including unplanned asset sales); services that require less funding than the existing budget provision; and savings from pay or price assumptions.

To provide Ministers with some flexibility in terms of managing their own budgets and incentivise additional asset sales, departments are allowed to retain reduced requirements up to a limit of £1 million. This limit applies equally to capital and resource expenditure. Departments can therefore reallocate internally easements below £1 million in value as long as they are reallocated within the same category of expenditure (i.e. a capital reduced requirement must be reallocated to a capital project).

Chancellor's Autumn Statement: Barnett Consequentials

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the Barnett Consequentials, or other budgetary implications for Northern Ireland, arising from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.
(AQW 19915/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below shows the total RDEL and CDEL Barnett consequentials resulting from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. The consequentials are unhypothecated with the exception of £3.1m capital in 2013-14 and £8.2m capital in 2014-15 which must be used on loan and equity financial transactions.

Table: 2012 Autumn Statement Barnett Allocations for Northern Ireland

£ millions	2013-14	2014-15
RDEL	2.4	-34.3
CDEL	53.7	76.9

The additional resources should be welcomed, in particular the CDEL additions over the next two years.

In addition to the Barnett consequentials outlined above, I have negotiated a deferment of some £50 million RRI borrowing from 2012-13 to 2014-15 in relation to the funding for the A5 road scheme. As you will be aware the A5 project is currently subject to legal challenge and decisions on profiling of spend cannot be taken by the DRD Minister until the outcome of that legal challenge is known.

This deferment of RRI borrowing allows the Executive to now accommodate the changing profile of A5 spend.

Rates: Exemption for Charities

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 19346/11-15, what number of retail outlets the (i) 4.1 percent in 2010; and (ii) 4.6 percent in 2012 represents.
(AQW 20016/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As at the end of March 2010 (the earliest year for which comparable information is available) the number of retail outlets that were occupied and were getting a rating exemption as a result of being a charity was 646. As at the end of March 2012 the equivalent figure was 718.

Departments: Underspend

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is aware of any projected underspend by Departments for this financial year; and what actions he has taken to address this issue.
(AQW 20026/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Each month my department commissions a Forecast Outturn return from all NI departments requesting the expenditure incurred to date and a forecast of spend for the remainder of the year.

The most recent return was received on 8 February 2013 and showed departments forecasting near to full spend for this financial year in non ring-fenced resource DEL. Within capital DEL all departments forecast near to full spend with the exception of DRD on the A5 project and DOJ on the Integrated Training College. The underspends reported on these 2 projects are subject to separate arrangements with HM Treasury and this funding is not available for general reallocation nor will it be lost to NI.

The reported forecast information to date therefore does not require any intervention at this stage however I will continue to monitor this situation and will take action, if required, to ensure that no resources are lost to NI. You will be aware that the Spring Supplementary Estimates included some headroom to allow for such circumstances.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Health and Social Care Trusts: Locum Consultants

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust spent on locum consultants, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19331/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The spend on locum consultants in Health and Social Care Trusts in each of the last three years is set out below:

Year	Belfast HSC Trust[1]	Northern HSC Trust[2]	Southern HSC Trust	South-Eastern HSC Trust	Western HSC Trust
2009/2010	£7,500,000	£2,800,000	£3,424,244	£1,121,000	£2,975,000
2010/2011	£7,100,000	£1,100,000	£1,993,277	£571,000	£4,571,000
2011/2012	£10,300,000	£982,000	£1,337,702	£709,000	£2,989,000

1 Belfast HSC Trusts systems cannot isolate expenditure on Agency employed locum consultants from expenditure on other Agency employed medical locums. Thus, the figures for Belfast HSC Trust include expenditure in respect of Agency locum junior and middle-ranking doctors.

2 Northern HSC Trusts systems isolate expenditure on Agency employed consultants, but do not isolate expenditure on internal locums from normal consultant payroll. Where possible, the Trust will recruit staff directly under Trust terms and conditions as temporary employees to fill the vacancies

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: Consultation Period

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the consultation period on paediatric services at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children will have on the pressures facing parents of children supported by the service during this time.[R]
(AQW 19462/11-15)

Mr Poots: I assume that Mr Swann is asking about the Health and Social Care Board's consultation on the future commissioning of Paediatric Cardiac Surgery (PCCS) and Interventional Cardiology for the population of Northern Ireland. I have repeatedly stated that my ultimate aim is to ensure a safe and sustainable service for children from Northern Ireland and I reiterate my assurance to parents that the future service model for Paediatric Cardiac Surgery will prioritise the needs of their children. I fully appreciate that parents and children living with congenital cardiac problems may be anxious about any changes in the service and how these might impact on the care provided to them. However, I trust that they will understand

why the consultation on the future of this service was needed, the importance which I attach to the input from parents and their representatives to the consultation and my commitment to reach a decision as soon as possible on the future commissioning of this service.

Telemonitoring

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to introduce Telemonitoring on a wider basis, allowing more patients to benefit from the scheme.
(AQW 19481/11-15)

Mr Poots: Remote monitoring is presently available to patients with respiratory, heart and diabetes long term chronic conditions and for those who have suffered a stroke. The Regional Telemonitoring NI service is delivered by TF3, a consortium of Tunstall Healthcare, Fold Telecare and S3 Group, through a contract with the five Health and Social Care Trusts. Through the contract it is planned to extend the telemonitoring service to approximately 20,000 patients by 2017. During 2012/13 it is estimated that outturn for remotely monitored telehealth services will be in the region of 300,000 monitored patient days (MPD).

During 2013/14, the delivery of telemonitoring services through the contract will widen to include both telehealth and telecare services, each with a separate delivery target set out in the Commissioning Plan Direction. The target for telehealth is 500k MPD and for telecare services is 720k MPD. This represents a significant increase on the current year.

Meat Labelling and Traceability

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) who is responsible for investigating issues related to meat packaging and queries regarding labelling and traceability; (ii) when his Department and the Food Standards Agency are informed of such investigations; (iii) what is a reasonable time scale when investigating such issues; and (iv) in addition to the recent case at Freeza Meats in Newry, how many other investigations are taking place regarding labelling and traceability.
(AQW 19510/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Food Standards Agency is the central competent authority for food safety in Northern Ireland and is also responsible for policy relating to general food labelling and food standards. Day to day enforcement of food standards and food labelling are carried out by District Council Environmental Health Officers (EHOs). District Council EHOs carry out routine food standards inspections and interventions on a risk based frequency in accordance with a Framework Agreement between the District Councils and FSA in NI.

DARD is responsible for enforcing the Beef Labelling legislation in abattoirs and approved cutting premises, with District Councils enforcing Beef Labelling legislation at retail level and cold stores on behalf of DARD, along with general food labelling regulations on processed meat products

DARD is also responsible for meat hygiene official controls in approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments on behalf of the FSA.

(ii) If as a result of routine investigations the enforcement officers of the District Council identify a potential food safety incident, they are obliged to inform the Food Standards Agency in accordance with the FSA Incidents Response Protocol as soon as possible. An incident is defined as any event, where based on the information available, there are concerns about actual or suspected threats to the safety or quality of food and/or feed that could require intervention to protect consumer interests.

In regard to Beef Labelling legislation, the principal responsibility for compliance rests with Food Business Operators. DARD undertakes a programme of risk based inspections in abattoirs and approved cutting plants and any non-compliances observed during these inspections are followed up, and appropriate action taken as soon as possible.

(iii) Incidents are classified as either high, medium or low based on a classification matrix set out in the protocol. All incidents are immediately acted upon by FSA and details cascaded to those required to investigate further. Timescale in relation to investigation of an incident is dependent on complexity and scale of the issue. An incident investigation will not be closed until the FSA is satisfied that all necessary action has been taken to protect consumer interests.

(iv) The investigation concerning products held in the cold store at Freeza Meats is one strand of a wider investigation concerning labelling and traceability. The other strand of the investigation concerns the discovery of traces of pork DNA in a selection of meat pies labelled as Halal, where the affected product was manufactured by McColgan's Quality Foods in Strabane. Aside from this, there are currently no other specific investigations taking place regarding labelling and traceability in Northern Ireland.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the review of paediatric cardiac surgery provision, including the options currently under consideration for providing paediatric cardiac surgery.
(AQW 19512/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) on 14 February 2013 approved a framework, or post-consultation document, for the commissioning of paediatric cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology for children in Northern Ireland.

The framework has been submitted to my Department for my consideration. It is my intention to make a decision on the framework shortly. Subject to my approval the framework will then be applied by the HSCB to each of the options outlined in the document, with the aim of identifying a preferred way forward for the provision of services for children with heart disease in Northern Ireland. The preferred way forward will then be submitted to me for consideration and I am aiming to make my final decision on the future arrangements for this service within the coming months.

The post consultation document is available on the HSC Board website:

http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/news/Paediatric_Congenital_Cardiac_Services.html

Paediatric Cardiac Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) staffing; and (ii) financial resources which were made available for paediatric cardiac care in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19514/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The number of staff working in paediatric cardiac care in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

Paediatric Cardiac Care	2008/09 WTE	2009/10 WTE	2010/11 WTE	2011/12 WTE	2012/13 WTE
Cardiology nursing staff	19.32	17.54	16.83	18.89	18.42
Cardiology consultant staff	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Cardiac surgery consultant staff	1.0	1.0*	1.0*	1.0*	2.0*
Consultant cardiac anaesthetists with paediatric specialty	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Cardiac theatre nursing team**	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0	30.0
Cardiac ICU nursing team**	93.0	93.0	93.0	93.0	93.0
Perfusion team**	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Cardiac technicians	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0	11.0

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

WTE whole time equivalent

* Plus network arrangements with 2.0 wte surgeons from Dublin

** These teams do not provide an exclusive service to paediatric cardiac surgery, as they also provide care to the cardiac surgery adult population

(ii) The financial resources made available for paediatric care over the last five years is set out below.

Activity carried out in Northern Ireland

Funding for paediatric cardiac care includes funding for paediatric surgery and paediatric cardiology.

The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board has advised that the amount of money allocated by the HSC for paediatric cardiac surgery over the last five years in the Belfast Trust is as follows:

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

	Total Cost
2007/08	£1,712,608
2008/09	£1,726,555
2009/10	£2,077,196
2010/11	£1,528,297
2011/12	£1,664,244

Specialty cost information is not yet available for the 2012/13 year.

The amount of money allocated by the HSC for paediatric cardiology over the last five years in the Belfast Trust is as follows:

Paediatric Cardiology (includes inpatient, outpatient and daycase)

	Total Cost
2007/08	£2,472,882
2008/09	£2,391,065
2009/10	£2,744,808
2010/11	£2,237,597
2011/12	£2,553,966

Specialty cost information is not yet available for the 2012/13 year.

Other Activity

Information on the costs for paediatric cardiac transfers; paediatric cardiac surgery; and cardiology transfers outside Northern Ireland could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

East Belfast: Cancer Rates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the figures for new incidents of cancer in East Belfast for 2012.
(AQW 19588/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry that an analysis of cancer rates in Northern Ireland indicates that the overall rates of cancer in the East Belfast Assembly constituency area were found to be similar to the Northern Ireland average. That analysis also reveals that when broken down by cancer site, lung cancer rates in the East Belfast constituency were 13.8% higher than the Northern Ireland average for both sexes combined. The majority of lung cancers are attributable to cigarette smoking.

East Belfast: Health Outcomes

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the risks to East Belfast residents of stroke, hypertension, diabetes, and kidney disease are higher than the Northern Ireland average.
(AQW 19596/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health outcomes are generally worse in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland when compared with those witnessed in the region generally. Belfast has the highest level of deprivation in Northern Ireland, with some 40% of the most deprived areas being within the Belfast Local Government District. Deprivation translates not only into lower life expectancy, but a greater burden of disease and consequently a greater dependence on health and social care services.

Belfast East Assembly Area does have the highest prevalence in Northern Ireland of certain conditions including Stroke, and has relatively high prevalence of diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease. The prevalence of these conditions is known to increase with age, however, and it should be noted that, from the census figures, Belfast East Assembly Area has the second highest mean age of residents in Northern Ireland and the second highest percentage of population aged 65 years and over.

Reducing inequalities in health is a particular challenge requiring long term co-ordinated effort across government and all sectors, including statutory and the voluntary and community sectors. There are many factors within and beyond individual control which interact to influence our health and wellbeing. Work is being taken forward to develop a new cross-cutting public health strategic framework. ‘Fit and Well – Changing Lives’ has been published for consultation and is timetabled to be completed in Spring 2013.

Human Trafficking

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to increase the number of refuge places available for the victims of human trafficking.
(AQW 19611/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to my previous answer to AQW 19151/11-15.

There are no designated places of refuge for victims of human trafficking within the health and social care services. However, if it has been assessed that a place of refuge is required, this will be provided in conjunction with other relevant agencies. Provision will differ depending on the age of the victim and his/her assessed needs.

The Health and Social Care Board and Local Commissioning Groups are responsible for commissioning health and social care services across the region. Annual commissioning plans are based on assessed service requirements, including arrangements to provide appropriate safeguards for vulnerable children and adults, which will include victims of human trafficking.

DHSSPS: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19627/11-15)

Mr Poots: Hospitality spend for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and each of the Department's Arms Length Bodies, in 2011/12, is set out in the table below.

	£'000
DHSSPS	49.1
Belfast HSC Trust	10.0
Northern HSC Trust	12.5
Southern HSC Trust	44.0
South Eastern HSC Trust	17.4
Western HSC Trust	9.0
NI Ambulance Service	2.7
Business Services Organisation	39.4
Health and Social Care Board	51.9
Public Health Agency	44.4
Patient Client Council	15.9
NI Fire & Rescue Service	6.3
NI Practice & Education Council	-
NI Social Care Council	18.6
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency	0.5
NI Blood Transfusion Service	-
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority	8.6
NI Medical & Dental Training Agency	4.4
Total	**334.7**

All organisations across the HSC have comprehensive policies and procedures in respect of hospitality which outline the eligibility and entitlement to hospitality.

Due to the wide ranging operational nature of the Department's ALB's, hospitality may also include expenditure other than that associated with the provision of refreshments, for example room and/or equipment hire.

Drink or Drug Addiction Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available in Belfast for people with drink or drug addictions.
(AQW 19634/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under my Department's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase Two, the Health & Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency commission alcohol and drug services that are provided across a range of settings in the Belfast area, both by Statutory and Voluntary/Community sectors.

The services available in the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust area typically consist of counselling and support, rehabilitation, advice, liaison, detoxification, relapse therapy, outreach services and a range of individual and group-based psychological treatments, as well as a range of prevention and early intervention programmes.

Details of these services can be found by accessing the following link:

http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/DrugsAlcohol_Directory_BelfastTrust_12_12_1.pdf

Neurology

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 19133/11-15, why it costs less to refer a patient to a neurologist in the independent sector than the Health Service; and (ii) what action he is taking to ensure that the Health Service will be more competitive on this issue than the independent sector.
(AQW 19637/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average cost of referring a patient to a neurologist in the independent sector is lower as the independent sector is generally used only to assess and treat patients categorised as mainstream. Patients who fall outside this category, i.e. patients with complex co-morbidities or with conditions requiring complex care and treatment are not referred to the independent sector or, if referred, are returned to Health and Social Care (HSC). As HSC Trusts are required to address all the needs of all patients referred to them, Trust capacity must therefore be capable of addressing both simple and complex cases and this is reflected in the different funding requirements and average costs.

Hospitals: Vending Machines

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to restrict the availability of high content sugar available drinks in vending machines in waiting areas of hospitals.
(AQW 19640/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vending machines on HSC Trust premises offer a variety of choices for visitors and staff as well as patients. The options include low-calorie and sugar-free drinks and bottled water as well as high sugar content drinks. There are currently no plans to restrict these choices.

Measles

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the current incidence of measles, particularly among children; and how this compares with other parts of the UK.
(AQW 19654/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures for 2012 for confirmed cases of measles were:

England:	1900	
Wales:	116	
Scotland:	28	(up to beginning of December)
NI:	9	

In the first six weeks of 2013 there were six cases of measles reported in Northern Ireland. Five of these were children. This figure is provisional and requires validation. Other parts of the UK have not published any figures yet for 2013.

MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) immunisation is the safest and most effective way to prevent measles infection. It is never too late to vaccinate and children and young people of all ages should have two doses of the MMR vaccine to ensure they are protected. It is vitally important to ensure children and young people's vaccinations are up to date, particularly if they are in groups or settings where they may be at risk of getting an infection or, if they are infected, of passing on infection to other vulnerable individuals.

The uptake of MMR vaccine in Northern Ireland is at a sufficiently high level to prevent the measles virus from circulating in the general population. The recent cases of measles have occurred in unvaccinated people. The Public Health Agency has been working to ensure that these unvaccinated children are offered the MMR vaccine. PHA has also been working with local schools in the area to offer vaccination clinics, so that any other child who is unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated receives MMR as required.

Adult Social Care

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions his officials have had, or intend to have, with their counterparts in Westminster on changes to the funding of care for the elderly.
(AQW 19656/11-15)

Mr Poots: As social care is a devolved matter, the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt MP, of plans to reform funding arrangements for adult social care in England does not apply to Northern Ireland.

However, recognising the importance of this issue, my Department is currently engaged in an extensive public consultation until 15 March on the discussion document, "Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in NI". The purpose of the consultation is to hear people's views on key issues including the type of services we want to see in the future, who should provide them, and, crucially, how we should pay for them. Following the consultation my Department will develop proposals for reform, which will include changes to how care and support is funded.

In this context my officials have been in regular contact with their counterparts in England, and the rest of the UK, in relation to reforms in each of those jurisdictions and will continue to liaise closely with them throughout the reform process in Northern Ireland.

Health and Social Care Regional Procurement Board

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16519/11-15, whether the Health and Social Care Regional Procurement Board intends to move to standard 30 day payment terms from September 2013.
(AQW 19675/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Regional Procurement Board has been advised that it is necessary to change the terms and conditions of contract in respect of payment earlier than the planned September 2013 date. It has also been advised that this change should take place commensurate with the introduction of the new payment legislation (expected March 2013). However, the UK Government has not yet published its response to the consultation or the draft regulations pertaining to this legislation and therefore, precise terms cannot yet be advised upon.

Health and Social Care Regional Procurement Board

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16519/11-15, whether the Health and Social Care Regional Procurement Board sought legal advice prior to its decision in June 2012 to move to standard 30 day payment terms; and the dates on which this advice was sought and received.
(AQW 19676/11-15)

Mr Poots: The HSC Regional Procurement Board did not seek legal advice in June 2012 prior to taking its decision to change to 30 day payment terms.

Antrim Area Hospital

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the work to upgrade the Antrim Area Hospital will be completed and open to patients.
(AQW 19726/11-15)

Mr Poots: The current phase of works at Antrim Area Hospital will provide a new Emergency Department and 24 Bed Ward.

The new 24 bed ward was completed on 4 February 2013 and the planned operational date is 26 March 2013.

The new Emergency Department is due to be completed on 28 April 2013 and the planned operational date is 26 June 2013

Smoking

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to further reduce the number of people who smoke.
(AQW 19829/11-15)

Mr Poots: Reducing smoking prevalence in Northern Ireland is a key priority for my Department and this is reflected in the ten-year tobacco control strategy which I launched last year. The strategy contains the following three main objectives: preventing people from starting to smoke; supporting smokers to quit; and protecting the population from tobacco-related harm. A comprehensive action plan for the strategy is currently being developed by a multi-sectoral implementation group. This work is being co-ordinated by the Public Health Agency.

My Department is engaged in an ongoing programme of legislative change with regards to tobacco control, the main aim of which is to prevent the uptake of smoking by young people. Sales of tobacco from vending machines were banned from 1 March 2012, and a ban on the display of tobacco products in large shops, introduced from 30 October 2012, will be rolled out to small shops from 1 April 2015.

In the forthcoming months, I also intend to introduce a Bill to the Assembly which will impose tougher sanctions on retailers who persistently sell tobacco products to those under the legal age of sale.

Other legislative options under consideration are the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products and a ban on smoking in private vehicles. Decisions on these issues will only be made following comprehensive consultation exercises and considered analysis of the responses.

I will also continue to invest in public information campaigns to inform people about the dangers of smoking, and in the further development of smoking cessation services provided in a range of accessible settings.

Adult Social Care

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has made any assessment of the costs of non-medical and medical care of older people in a residential care home which the Department considers reasonable; and to outline these costs.
(AQW 19835/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is the duty of the Department to provide or secure the provision of an integrated health and social care system for the people of Northern Ireland. Healthcare, including medical support for clients in residential care or nursing homes is provided free of charge. Healthcare is primarily provided via a client's GP and Health and Social Care Trusts, and is not part of the cost of the care home placement. The cost of such medical support is not currently cost effective to quantify because of the mixture of private and public systems involved.The cost of a residential care home placement includes a combination of personal care, board and accommodation costs.

My Department does not operate a regular or current information collection system concerning the cost breakdown of a package of care delivered in a residential care home i.e. the balance between personal care and accommodation costs. Similarly, it does not operate a regular data collection system which seeks to identify the cost of nursing care in nursing homes.

My Department is currently engaged in an extensive public consultation until 15 March on the discussion document, "Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in NI". The purpose of the consultation is to hear people's views on key issues including the type of services we want to see in the future, who should provide them, and, crucially, how we should pay for them. Following the consultation my Department will develop proposals for reform, which will include changes to how care and support is funded. This will include up to date analysis of the relevant costs and benefits as required.

Residential Care Homes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether an assessment has been made of the comparative cost of the care per resident in state-run and privately-run elderly care homes; and to detail the assessment undertaken and its findings.
(AQW 19837/11-15)

Mr Poots: No recent assessment has been commissioned by the Regional Health and Social Care Board ("HSCB") or my Department on the comparative costs of care per resident in state run and privately run nursing and residential care homes. However, in 2007 my Department sponsored a Value For Money study of statutory residential care homes. This study concluded, using costs from 2005, that there were lower costs in the private sector and that the differential arose in part from higher sick absence in the statutory sector, higher overheads in the statutory sector including refurbishment costs due to the condition of buildings, from lower pension contributions in the private sector and from the then higher financing costs of the buildings in the statutory sector. Note that some of these factors may have changed since that time.

This said, true Value for Money is about more than cost considerations, it also must take into account quality, client complexity and whether care needs are being met.

Following the Review of Public Administration, the HSCB is now responsible for operational matters. This includes the commissioning of future studies, as required.

My Department is currently consulting on Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in Northern Ireland. This document reiterates government policy - to support people to live at home for as long as it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Adult Social Care

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that house prices in Northern Ireland are lower than in South East England and that the main component in personal wealth is house value, for his assessment of the cap that should be placed on personal savings as a contribution towards elderly care.
(AQW 19839/11-15)

Mr Poots: Social care is a devolved matter and, consequently, the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt MP, of plans to introduce a cap on individual contributions to social care in 2017, does not apply to Northern Ireland.

I recognise, however, that this is an issue about which people feel strongly and that is why I have committed to a three stage process of reform in Northern Ireland. As a first step, my Department is currently engaged in an extensive public consultation until 15 March on the discussion document, "Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in NI". The purpose of the consultation is to hear people's views on key issues including the type of services we want to see in the future, who should provide them, and, crucially, how we should pay for them.

Once I have had the opportunity to consider the views and opinions of the people of Northern Ireland my Department will develop proposals for reform, which will include changes to how care and support is funded. In so doing, I will be considering in detail how local socio-economic circumstances, demographics, and other local characteristics might influence any proposed changes.

ENT Consultants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of ENT consultants employed by each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last four years; and (ii) whether, following the introduction of the care in the community pilot scheme at Holywood Arches Health Centre, the number of doctors providing ENT outpatient appointments and/or treatment in the rest of the Health Trusts was reduced, and to provide further details.
(AQW 19848/11-15)

Mr Poots:

HSC Trust	2009	2010	2011	2012
Belfast HSC Trust	8	9	8	8
Northern HSC Trust	6	5	5	5
South Eastern HSC Trust	4	4	3	4
Southern HSC Trust	5	6	8	7
Western HSC Trust	6	6	6	6
Total	**29**	**30**	**30**	**30**

There has been no reduction in the number of doctors providing ENT services in any HSC Trust as a result of the pilot exercise at Holywood Arches Health Centre.

Meningitis B Vaccine, Bexsero

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to introduce the Meningitis B vaccine, Bexsero, into the routine immunisation system.
(AQW 19858/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vaccination policy in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is guided by the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers on matters relating to the provision of vaccination and immunisation services. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered.

The JCVI has begun an evaluation of the impact and cost-effectiveness of possible meningitis B vaccination strategies. This evaluation requires a complex analysis and final JCVI advice is not expected until later in the year. I will consider the JCVI recommendation when I have received it.

Fire Stations: Newtownstewart and Fintona

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to outline his capital spending priorities for the 2013/14 financial year; (ii) for an update on the business cases for Newtonstewart and Fintona fire stations; and (iii) whether he has plans to upgrade these stations from the current Portacabin facilities.
(AQW 19874/11-15)

Mr Poots: In light of the emerging needs of Transforming Your Care, my current capital priorities are kept under constant review. My current capital profile for the remaining 2 years of the current budget period includes:

Project/Programme	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
Capital Budget	**224.80**	**200.50**
Major Ongoing Projects	66.96	163.5
Annual Fixed Costs (excl IT)	95.5	29.0
NIFRS	6.0	6.0
ICT	28.20	20.0
Other Approved Schemes	49.04	12.9
Total Allocations in current approved Capital Scenario	245.70	231.4
Surplus/(Over Commitment)	(20.90)	(30.9)

The progression of business cases is set to ensure that approvals are in place in line with proposed expenditure as set out in the capital programme for DHSSPS and its arms length bodies. Given the constraints on my capital budget, the business cases for both Newtownstewart and Fintona Fire Stations have not progressed to approval as they are not sufficiently high up the list of NIFRS priorities to be profiled for expenditure in the current budget period.

Colostomy Bags

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are plans to make patients pay for colostomy bags.
(AQW 19882/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been considering a number of different options aimed at ensuring the efficient use of resources and looking at areas where money can be saved and used to protect front line services and improve access to certain specialised drugs. The possible introduction of prescription charges or some form of administrative or other fee relating to the receipt of prescriptions is one of the options I have been considering.

Any such proposals, including proposals to introduce exemption categories such as those previously applied to colostomy bags, would be subject to full public consultation.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Intensive Home Support Unit

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16870/11-15, for an update on the changes that have been made to the Intensive Home Support Unit in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and what consultation with staff and patients was undertaken prior to any changes.
(AQW 19895/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Health and Social Trust advise that they are currently reviewing some aspects of Adult Learning Disability Provision in order to enhance service provision across the Trust area. This is part of the ongoing work to develop new initiatives and to make existing services more effective and person centred.

To that end the Intensive Support Team, which only operates in the Armagh /Dungannon area has been reviewed and the decision has been reached to disband this Team and utilise their expertise across the service. Such changes are in keeping with the reform and modernisation of service provision to bring services closer to home, as proposed within Transforming Your Care.

The needs of service users currently receiving input from this Team are presently being reviewed. Their assessed needs will be met through alternative provision.

I am advised that changes have been subject to local consultation.

Crèche and Day Care Facilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of crèche and day care facilities in the (i) Foyle; (ii) East Londonderry; and (iii) East Antrim constituencies; and how many children are on the waiting lists for each establishment.
(AQW 19944/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below details the number of crèche and day care facilities in the Foyle, East Londonderry and East Antrim constituencies

It is not possible to detail waiting lists for each establishment as this information is not held by HSC Trusts.

Parliamentary Constituency	Day Nurseries	Out of Schools	Crèches	Playgroups	Total
Foyle	13	17	19	20	69
East Londonderry	12	12	8	28	60
East Antrim	12	10	3	20	45

Mental Health: Transition Between Child to Adult Services

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what transition process exists for patients with mental health illnesses who are moving from child to adult services.
(AQW 20007/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Trusts have transitional protocols in place, agreed between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Serivces(CAMHS) and Adult Mental Health Serivces(AMHS).

The protocols require forward planning and the development of an agreed transitional plan, in advance of any patient moving between these services. Arrangements are specific to the young person and will vary depending on complexity of need. The young person and their family/carers, will be fully involved in decision – making.

Transitional plans identify the worker from AMHS, the process for transfer and any joint working required between CAMHS and AMHS. They are implemented flexibly to ensure a managed process, with continuity of care and appropriate follow up for those patients who need it.

Department of Justice

Prisoner Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to Prisoner A, whether the relevant person or agency monitoring this individual following their release received any communication concerning regarding breaches of terms, and whether action was taken.
(AQW 18256/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Data Protection Act 1998 gives individuals certain rights in relation to personal information held on them by public authorities. The information requested cannot be provided as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18386/11-15, (i) when and by whom the Northern Ireland Prison Service was made aware by the Prisoner Ombudsman that she was of the opinion that there was evidence against the officer concerned based on the balance of probabilities; (ii) whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service was aware of the date and content of a press statement from by the Prisoner Ombudsman and whether it had been approved prior to release; and (iii) when the Prisoner Ombudsman briefed the complainant of her findings and whether she informed him that she was intending to release a press statement.
(AQW 19286/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) In March 2011 the Prisoner Ombudsman notified the Northern Ireland Prison Service that there was evidence against the officer concerned based on the balance of probabilities.

(ii) & (iii) I understand that the Prisoner Ombudsman's Office wrote directly to the Member on 4 February 2013 confirming that her Office made no public announcements in relation to this investigation.

G4S

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the roles and responsibilities of G4S staff during court sittings, and to clarify whether they are permitted to remove persons from the public gallery if they cause a disturbance.
(AQW 19301/11-15)

Mr Ford: The general roles and responsibilities of G4S staff performing Court Orderly duties during court sittings include:

- maintaining security of courtrooms;
- ensuring that items prohibited under the Criminal Justice Act (NI) 1945 that could be used to record court proceedings or take photographs are not introduced or employed in Court;
- ensuring that they comply with instructions issued by the Judiciary including cataloguing items left overnight in the Courtroom;
- calling for all case parties; and
- assisting to clear premises in the event of an emergency and/or an evacuation.

Under the Justice (NI) Act 2004 a court security officer acting in the execution of his duty may use reasonable force to restrain, remove or exclude any person if it is reasonably necessary to do so to enable the business of the court to be carried on without interference or delay, or to maintain order or secure the safety of any person in the building. This should, wherever possible, be done with diplomacy and by applying only the minimum of force.

Prison Officers: Dismissal due to Disability

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18443/11-15, how many prison officers have been dismissed due to a disability following long-term sickness caused by prisoner assault, from 12 April 2010 to 31 December 2012.
(AQW 19302/11-15)

Mr Ford: Between 12 April 2010 and 31 December 2012 there have been no prison officers dismissed due to a disability following long-term sickness caused by prisoner assault.

Prison Officers: Recruitment

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have been employed since the recent round of recruitment and of these how many are (i) on sick-leave of six weeks or more; and (ii) have since resigned, broken down by prison facility.
(AQW 19303/11-15)

Mr Ford: To date the Northern Ireland Prison Service has recruited 199 Custody Prison Officers (CPOs), five of whom have subsequently resigned. However, as less than five CPOs have had a period of sickness absence for the duration stipulated the actual number has been withheld. This is to protect the identity of those concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prisoners: Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners (i) gained accreditations in essential skills; and (ii) completed offending behaviour programmes, during 2011 and 2012.
(AQW 19304/11-15)

Mr Ford: During 2011 and 2012 the numbers of prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes are as follows:-

1 January – 31 December 2011	1 January - 31 December 2012
153	171

Essential skills within the Prison Service are Literacy, Numeracy, Information & Communication Technology (ICT) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The numbers of accreditations gained by prisoners in essential skills during 2011 and 2012 are as set out below:-

Location	Subject	1 April 2011 - 31 March 2012	1 April 2012 to date
Maghaberry	Literacy	139	80
	Numeracy	83	78
	ICT	91	122
	ESOL	17	29
		330	**309**
Magilligan	Literacy	293	270
	Numeracy	280	282
	ICT	128	15
	ESOL	35	50
		736	**617**
Hydebank Wood	Literacy	24	22
	Numeracy	38	14
	ICT	0	35
	ESOL	4	4
		66	**75**
Overall Total		**1132**	**1001**

Note: The 2012 year figures will not be completed until 31 March 2013 in line with the financial year.

Fuel Laundering

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the sentences imposed in respect of each conviction for fuel laundering related offences, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19320/11-15)

Mr Ford: Court sentencing datasets do not distinguish fuel laundering from other oils related crime offences which would be prosecuted under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

HM Revenue & Customs have confirmed that in the last four financial years, including 2012-13 to date, there have been fines of £9,916, costs of £180, Confiscation Orders of £1,211,211 and a Compensation Order of £500 imposed. In addition, suspended prison sentences totalling 157 months have been given. A total of 200 hours community service was imposed on one defendant and three people also received a Serious Crime Prevention Order in addition to their Confiscation Orders.

Prison Officers: Dismissal

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18305/11-15 and AQW 17469/11-15, whether he plans to review his answer in light of the Ministry of Justice, National Offender Management Service and Her Majesty's Prison Service Archiving, Retention and Disposal Policy; and (ii) whether he will provide a copy of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Policy on the subject,
(AQW 19324/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans to review the answers to AQW 18305/11-15 and AQW 17469/11-15. The Northern Ireland Prison Service, as an Agency of the Department of Justice, is only required to comply with the Departmental Retention and Disposal Schedule. A copy of this document has been placed in the Assembly library.

Death in Custody: Colin Bell

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18562/11-15, whether he intends to revise his answer in light of Recommendation 44 of the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman Report into the Death in Custody of Colin Bell.
(AQW 19334/11-15)

Mr Ford: My answer to AQW/18562/11-15 will remain unchanged given that Recommendation 44 of the Northern Ireland Prisoner Ombudsman's Report into the Death in Custody of Colin Bell pre dated April 2010.

Prisoner Riots

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18499/11-15, how many televisions have been destroyed as a result of prisoner riots, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19335/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Prison Staff: Ear Protection

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service provides mandatory ear protection for prison staff and the date this was introduced.
(AQW 19336/11-15)

Mr Ford: Hearing protection is provided in areas that have been assessed and considered necessary under the Control of Noise at Work (NI) Regulations 2006. This includes some workshops, dog kennels and the firing range.

With regards to the firing range, it is understood that ear protection has been provided from at least 1987 when Prison Service staff became responsible for firearms training.

Criminal Justice Race Unit

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether he will consider establishing a criminal justice race unit as recommended in the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities Report on Race and the Criminal Justice System.
(AQW 19378/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department is currently considering the findings and recommendations arising from the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) report, 'Race and Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland'. My officials will meet with NICEM in the coming weeks to consider the report in more detail.

My initial view is that the recommendation for a race unit does not fully take account of the existing systems, framework and structures within the Department of Justice, including the Departmental Equality Officer post, the Equality and Good Relations Forum, the Diversity Strategy, Equality Scheme and Equality Action Plan.

The Department of Justice Equality Scheme 2011-15 sets out the Department's arrangements for fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties to promote equality of opportunity between the nine categories of people, which includes persons of a different racial group, and to promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

In addition to using ECNI's recommended tools for screening and Equality Impact Assessments, the Department undertakes Shared Future Policy Proofing when developing and reviewing its policies. Shared Future Policy Proofing includes all Section 75 groups, on a non-statutory basis.

The Department's Equality Action Plan sets out the key initiatives planned to tackle the inequalities highlighted by an audit of inequalities undertaken by the Department as a result of ECNI's recommendation that all designated public authorities should carry out such an audit.

In terms of structures, two champions at senior civil service level, the Equality Champion and the Diversity Champion, ensure that equality and diversity are central considerations in all aspects of policy and practice within the Department and they report directly to the Departmental Board.

The Diversity Steering Group introduced four staff networks including the Black Ethnic Minority network, 'BEMLINK', which provides a safe environment for members to discuss sensitive workplace issues and raise awareness on black and ethnic minority affairs.

All of these existing systems, frameworks and structures will be taken unto consideration in any decision on the NICEM report's recommendation in relation to a dedicated criminal justice race unit.

Death in Custody: Colin Bell and John Deery

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18149/11-15 and in terms of the Colin Bell disciplinary investigation, to detail (i) the number of night custody officers who were suspended from duty and the start and end dates of suspension; (ii) the cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service per suspended officer; (iii) the cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service for all suspended officers; (iv) the cost in the John Deery case and; (v) whether any senior officers were disciplined resulting from the Bell case with offences of gross misconduct but not suspended from duty.
(AQW 19382/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the disciplinary investigation, 16 Night Custody Officers were suspended from duty with suspension dates ranging from 1 September 2008 to 26 October 2010.

Information regarding the cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) per suspended officer cannot be provided as this would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

The cost to NIPS in relation to all suspended officers was £532,038.47 and in the case of John Deery the cost was £339,167.74.

As less than five Senior Officers were disciplined following the death in custody of Colin Bell, the information cannot be disclosed as to do so would breach the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prison Staff: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of prison staff suspended by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in each of the last 5 years; (ii) how many times each suspension was reviewed, by what grade and on what time basis; (iii) the number of suspensions that were reported to him and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during this period as required by Rule 118 (2) of the Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (NI) 1995, as amended; and (iv) in how many suspension cases he and the Secretary of State issued directions to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 19388/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has suspended a total of 54 members of staff in the five year period 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2012. The actual number of suspensions in each year has been withheld. This is to protect the identity of the individuals concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998. The information requested at parts (ii) and (iii) could only be provided with the incurrence of disproportionate costs. In relation to part (iv) I refer the Member to my response to AQW 17089/11-15.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Procurement of Televisions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18499/11-15, to detail (i) whether the supplier is based in Northern Ireland; (ii) how often the contract has been put to tender in the last five years; and (iii) when it will be tendered in the future.
(AQW 19389/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service can confirm the contracted supplier is based in Northern Ireland.

The contract has been put out to tender once in the last five years; is due to be re-tendered in 2014; and is expected to be in place by September 2014. The tender process will commence approximately nine months beforehand.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of concerns raised in the report into the investigation of the closure of the Prisoner Assessment Unit, why senior prison staff/governors permitted night custody officers/staff to carry out duties outside their remit to the point where this became common practice, and whether he will give an assurance that this will not recur when the Prisoner Assessment Unit is reopened.
(AQW 19391/11-15)

Mr Ford: A corporate decision was taken to close the Prisoner Assessment Unit and this decision included ensuring that any improper customs and practices would be addressed. When the Prisoner Assessment Unit reopens newly approved Standard Operating procedures will be put in place.

Prisoners: Illegal or Non-prescribed Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of remand prisoners tested positive for illegal or non-prescribed drugs per prison facility, including Hydebank Wood, in 2012.
(AQW 19392/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 18761/11-15.

Prison Facilities

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what is the total capacity of our prison facilities.
(AQW 19417/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are a total of 2391 bed spaces currently available, but this level of occupancy is constrained by the need to keep various categories of prisoners in separate accommodation, and the desirability of avoiding cell sharing where possible.

Fuel Laundering

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice when she last contacted Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in order to quantify the monetary impact of fuel laundering on the Northern Ireland economy.
(AQW 19440/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figures on revenue lost to the UK economy through the use of non United Kingdom duty paid diesel in Northern Ireland are requested from HM Revenue and Customs periodically by my Department. This includes for the Organised Crime Task Force's reports. The Department of Justice also monitors the loss of revenue identified on individual operations.

The most recent figures are available in the HM Revenue and Customs publication "Measuring tax gaps 2012 Tax gap estimates for 2010- 11" which can be viewed at http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/tax-gaps/mtg-2012.pdf

There are, of course, other costs to the Northern Ireland economy associated with fuel laundering, namely the clean up cost in respect of the waste product from laundering plants and the cost to legitimate businesses.

Prisoner-at-risk Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17869/11-15, to detail (i) why the Northern Ireland Prison Service did not keep records on its training database as to the number of staff who participated in Prisoner at Risk briefing/ awareness sessions; (ii) whether Prisoner at Risk Training was compulsory and whether senior management instructed staff to attend such sessions; and (iii) how staff were informed by management that awareness sessions were available throughout the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 19441/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the time of the Prisoner at Risk training, the computer based training management system in place did not offer the facility to record short briefing/awareness sessions.

Awareness sessions were scheduled for all staff but were not mandatory.

Line managers are required to detail staff for training as and when it is scheduled, however, records are not available.

Prisons: Observation Cells

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the current status in relation to ligature points in observation/safer custody cells.
(AQW 19442/11-15)

Mr Ford: Observation cells in prison establishments have been designed to minimise the opportunity for self-harm, including anti-ligature furniture and fittings.

Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18387/11-15, whether he intends to make representations to the UK Border Agency on matters such as this and/or introduce legislation which could prevent such entries to Northern Ireland and reduce the risk to the public.
(AQW 19443/11-15)

Mr Ford: Matters relating to policy and legislation on the control of entry across UK national borders is a matter for the UK Government.

When an individual offender with convictions for sex offences comes to Northern Ireland, the PSNI can apply to the courts for a notification order which requires the person to notify their details to the police. Legislation currently before the Assembly will make this process more effective by removing the need for a court order and making notification a statutory requirement.

Prisoner-at-risk Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18364/11-15, to detail (i) how many of the 39 volunteer mentors accepted the offer of training; (ii) how many mentors have completed their training to date; and (iii) what the training will entail and its duration.
(AQW 19444/11-15)

Mr Ford: Of the 39 mentors who volunteered to take part in the Northern Ireland Prison Service Mentoring Scheme, a total of 21 staff accepted the offer of training and they have all completed their training.

The training entailed preparatory reading in advance of participating in a half day workshop. The attendees received information, advice and practical guidance on how to be an effective mentor. However, all mentors were provided with written guidance.

Prisons: Wireless Telegraphy

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department plans to introduce legislation making provision for interference with wireless telegraphy in prisons.
(AQW 19487/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has no plans to introduce legislation to make any further provision for interference with wireless telegraphy in prisons.

DOJ: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19494/11-15)

Mr Ford: Hospitality expenditure by the Department of Justice, including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, for the financial year 2011/12 was £55,418.97.

PSNI: Internal Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17980/11-15, whether the PSNI will provide training to adjudicators and to Prison Officers' Association members who are acting as friends, as recommended in the Ackah and Deane Report of December 2009.
(AQW 19546/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Ackah and Deane Report recommended training of staff in the operation of internal disciplinary and grievance procedures. The Police Service of Northern Ireland will train staff working in the Professional Standards Unit in relation to investigative techniques.

Maghaberry Prison: Visits by UK Border Agency Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) to detail the number of times that UK Border Agency staff attended Maghaberry Prison to engage with foreign nationals, in each of the last three years; (ii) what was the core purpose of the visits; and (iii) whether such meetings are normally also attended by prison staff.
(AQW 19549/11-15)

Mr Ford: Records have not been kept which detail the number of times UK Border Agency staff attended Maghaberry Prison although they visit Maghaberry annually to hold information sessions with foreign national prisoners.

UK Border Agency also attend the prison to conduct one to one interviews with foreign national prisoners who are being considered for deportation.

Prison staff are present at all meetings.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18562/11-15 and AQW 18760/11-15, to clarify the position given that these answers appear to be at variance over the role of the Prisoner Ombudsman in relation to recommending disciplinary action.
(AQW 19550/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no variance in my replies to questions AQW 18562/11-15 and AQW 18760/11-15.

I have been very clear as to the role of the Prisoner Ombudsman in relation to disciplinary actions. The Prisoner Ombudsman does not make recommendations to the Northern Ireland Prison Service regarding the suspension and/or dismissal of staff. The Prisoner Ombudsman may recommend that the Northern Ireland Prison Service considers conducting an internal disciplinary investigation into a staff member's actions where the outcome of an investigation would warrant it.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW15156/11-15, to provide an updated answer in respect of Legal Aid costs in each of the cases against (i) Bernadette McGeary; (ii) Stephen McGeary and (iii) Catherine Mooney.
(AQW 19551/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to the response to AQW/15156/11-15, committal proceedings for all defendants have now been heard in the magistrates' court and the defendants have been returned for trial to the Crown Court. Each defendant was represented by a solicitor only at the committal hearing. The following fees have been paid to each solicitor in respect of the proceedings at the magistrates' court.

Bernadette McGeary, a total of £1,413.78 (including VAT of £235.63)

Stephen McGeary, a total of £1,142.88 (including VAT of £190.48)

Catherine Mooney, a total of £1,254.10 (including VAT of £209.02)

The Crown Court cases are ongoing and at present there is insufficient information available to establish how each case will proceed. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the total legal aid bill at this stage.

Human Trafficking

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether there are plans to increase the number of places of refuge available for victims of trafficking.
(AQW 19625/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department funds a support service for potential adult victims of human trafficking. The support service is demand-led and includes the provision of accommodation for potential adult victims in a safe and secure environment. During the term of the contract no difficulty has been experienced in meeting the demand for accommodation for potential adult victims of human trafficking.

I have no plans therefore to increase the number of places of refuge available for those victims.

Courthouses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many courthouses are currently in operation.
(AQW 19693/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 21 courthouses in operation in Northern Ireland.

PSNI: Resource Group

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice whether he has had any discussions with the Chief Constable, or any of his staff, regarding the grievance arrangements for civilian staff employed by the Resource Group and working in PSNI stations.
(AQW 19729/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Minister of Justice I have frequent discussions with the Chief Constable across a range of issues.

However, the terms and conditions of civilian staff employed by the Resource Group, including the administrative arrangements in place in respect of conduct and accountability for such staff, are operational matters for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board and, as such, it would be inappropriate for me to comment upon employment matters for civilian staff employed by the PSNI.

PSNI: Starting Salaries

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the proposals to reduce police starting salaries to £19,000 in England and Wales and whether he envisages this being implemented in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19850/11-15)

Mr Ford: The announcement by the Home Secretary regarding pay scales relates to new recruits in England and Wales. I routinely consider developments in policing elsewhere in the UK and their potential implications in the context of Northern Ireland. Any proposals relating to pay scales for the PSNI will be negotiated at Police Negotiating Board in the usual way.

Prisons: Body Scanners

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice, following the results of the trial of the millimetre wave scanner, what alternative trialing will the Prison Service commence to comply with Recommendation 8 of the Ann Owers Report.
(AQW 19942/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service remains committed to seeking a viable, less intrusive alternative to our existing practice of full searching.

Although the recently completed pilot and evaluation of Millimetre Wave technology showed that there were limitations to it as an alternative to full body searching, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) will, if possible, continue to work with suppliers to see if such technology can be improved for application in the prison environment.

NIPS also intends to take forward its Justification Application under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004 in relation to the initial piloting and possible use of Transmission X-ray scanners in Northern Ireland's prisons.

This application is well advanced and it is expected that it will be ready for submission to the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) within the next few weeks. This is a complex and lengthy process that has never been undertaken by a UK prison before so it is not possible, at this stage, to provide a timescale as to when a possible pilot of Transmission X-ray technology can commence.

Department for Regional Development

Water Bills

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the value of water bills that have been revised following complaints from consumers, in the last two years.
(AQW 19106/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that in the two year period covering 2011 and 2012 (i) 5,765 customers' bills (representing 1.7% of the total bills issued) were revised following complaints from the customer and (ii) the net value of the bill adjustments was £2.80 million (representing 2.1% of total billed income).

Profile of bill adjustments, i.e. increase / decrease, as detailed below:

Adjustment Type	Number of Bills	Number of Bills as % of Total Bills Issued	Adjustment Value £' Million	Adjustment Value as % of Total Billed Income
Bill Increased	931	0.3%	£0.42	0.3%
Bill Decreased	4,834	1.5%	(£3.18)	(2.4%)
Total	**5,765**	**1.7%**	**(£2.76)**	**(2.1%)**

Public Transport: Bus Shelters in Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new bus shelters are planned for the Bangor area over the next year.
(AQW 19351/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The current contract for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters in Northern Ireland, between my Department and Adshel, which was approved whilst Peter Robinson was Minister for Regional Development, has delivered over 1350 new bus shelters since 2001, at no cost to my Department. The current contract does not expire until the end of 2015, however, it does not make provision for any new shelters.

In order to ensure the future provision of bus shelters, my Department is currently working towards the establishment of new contractual arrangements, which are to be in place for 2015.

The current contract has provided 58 shelters in the North Down area and in the interim, requests for shelters will be recorded and when the new contract is in place they will be given priority.

It should be noted that Local Councils can also provide bus shelters, should they wish to do so.

Public Transport: Metro Passenger Journeys in Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of passenger journeys for each Metro route in Belfast for the July-September period, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 19356/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the figures as provided by Translink. It should be noted that some ticket classes are excluded for example School pupil journeys.

	Passenger Journeys (01 July – 31 August)				
	2008	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
ME Corridor 1 (Antrim Rd)	373,742	389,967	385,282	376,070	386,605
ME Corridor 2 (Shore Rd)	374,775	414,641	413,721	425,220	420,844
ME Corridor 3 (Holywood Rd)	222,198	223,949	221,215	218,858	233,528
ME Corridor 4 (Upp Nards Rd)	489,703	500,082	487,001	490,276	515,164
ME Corridor 5 (Castlereagh Rd)	151,943	147,788	136,874	139,293	142,256
ME Corridor 6 (Cregagh Rd)	199,540	200,718	189,937	193,022	206,545
ME Corridor 7 (Ormeau Rd)	316,438	322,878	320,772	316,787	311,865
ME Corridor 8 (Malone Rd)	174,280	171,139	169,181	164,614	173,325
ME Corridor 9 (Lisburn Rd)	232,801	234,598	227,181	230,973	235,974
ME Corridor 10 (Falls Rd)	467,696	456,617	440,460	453,029	469,085
ME Corridor 11 (Shankill Rd)	284,292	282,007	262,223	275,937	271,021
ME Corridor 12 (Oldpark Rd)	294,554	287,623	275,149	282,010	269,586
ME Corridor 13 (City Express)	91,348	89,213	82,366	78,813	68,834
Metro Others **	44,065	44,520	49,410	43,198	42,959
Totals	**3,717,375**	**3,765,740**	**3,660,772**	**3,688,100**	**3,747,591**

Note: ** Others' relate to Metro services outside the main corridor routes, e.g. Easibus, George Best Belfast City Airport, Park & Ride, dedicated schools

Public Transport: Ulsterbus Passenger Journeys into Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of passenger journeys for each Ulsterbus route into Belfast for the July-September period, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 19357/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the information provided by Translink. However, Translink has advised that the statistics provided below are for Ulsterbus services where passengers alighted within Central Belfast mainly Europa Buscentre or Belfast City centre.

To collate any additional information would involve considerable time and effort at disproportionate cost.

Please note some ticket classes are excluded notably Pupil passes but given the period covered school holiday period numbers for this group would be negligible.

Ulsterbus passenger journeys into Belfast 1 July – 31 August

Year	**Journeys**
2012	601,578
2011	580,157
2010	553,229
2009	606,841
2008	649,055

Public Transport: Larne Line Service

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of train cancellations or changes to express services on weekday mornings since the new timetable was introduced on the Larne line; and (ii) if Translink have plans to add six car train sets to increase capacity at peak times.
(AQW 19439/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that the new timetable was introduced from Sunday 6 January 2013 following extensive consultation with existing users and key stakeholders. It incorporates two express services each weekday morning on the Larne line.

In the period to Friday 8 February the service had been operating for 5 weeks with a total of 50 express services scheduled. During this time one service regrettably had to be cancelled (31 January) due to mechanical problems with the train at Whitehead and one service was terminated (short of Great Victoria Street) at Central Station, due to signalling difficulties.

Translink continue to experience increasing passenger numbers on most morning services between Carrickfergus and Belfast. Translink will continue to monitor passenger loadings on all morning services in line with the commitment set out in the Passenger's Charter. This commitment is that under normal circumstances passengers should not have to stand during off-peak services and during peak operating periods NI Railways will use all available trains so that no passenger should have to stand for more than 20 minutes. Translink continue to monitor passenger loadings to ensure future capacity is deployed where it is most needed. In their view, it is premature for the introduction of six car sets on the Larne line at this time, however, they have indicated that once demand patterns have stabilised and the need for such a provision can more accurately be gauged, this proposal may be given further consideration.

A4 Dual Carriageway

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what the acceptable noise level is on the A4 Dual Carriageway which transverses 15 miles of rural countryside from Moygashel to Ballygawley Roundabout.
(AQW 19445/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Increases in noise levels, arising from the construction of a new road, are considered in respect of both the interior and exterior of residential buildings.

The Noise Insulation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (NIR) applies to all new, or altered, roads (effective December 1995) and is the legislation intended to ensure that increases in noise levels within the interior of residential buildings, arising from the newly constructed road, should not constitute a nuisance. This legislation also sets an exterior noise level of 68 decibels (dB), as the threshold for determining whether interior noise levels constitute a nuisance. The legislation requires that greater than 1dB of noise must be attributable to the new road.

There are no statutory limits on acceptable exterior noise levels. The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), adopted by the four UK Highway Authorities, recommends that when road traffic noise, as a result of a new road, causes an increase in exterior noise level of 3dB in the long term, a detailed noise assessment should be undertaken to establish if mitigation measures should be considered. It should be noted that whilst 3dB is the limit to establish if a detailed assessment is required, a 3db increase in noise level cannot automatically be held as constituting a nuisance. The 3dB increase is not seen as a trigger whereby mitigation measures must be implemented, but is instead a threshold of potential significance from which other factors should also be considered, to determine if the impact would be considered significant. If the impact is deemed to be significant, the practicality of mitigation can be reviewed, to establish if the effect can be ameliorated.

The DMRB sets out, that in the long term, a noise increase of 5-10 dB increase in noise level is considered "moderate", whilst noise increases greater than 10dB are considered to be "major". The Environmental Statement prepared for the A4 dual carriageway, identified 28 properties that, subject to detailed design (possible low noise surfacing etc), could be subjected to greater than 68dB of noise, 11 of which would experience noise increases of greater than 10dB. The DBFO Company responsible for the detailed design and delivery of the new road has confirmed that mitigation measures have been implemented, to ensure that predicted noise levels at all residential buildings are less than 68dB (even at 15 years after opening of the road to account for traffic growth).

Public Transport: Bus Services in Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of passengers who have used bus services in Bangor, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19488/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the figures as provided by Translink and is based on information pertaining to Bangor Town Services. Journeys originating in Bangor with a destination outside Bangor (and vice-versa) have been excluded. In addition some ticket classes are excluded, e.g. Pupil Passes.

Year	Passenger journeys
2011/12	510,103
2010/11	522,071
2009/10	597,204
2008/09	687,715
2007/08	618,442

Public Transport: Bangor to Belfast Train and Bus Services

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of passengers using the Bangor to Belfast (i) train service; and (ii) bus service, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19489/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the figures as provided by Translink and is based on passengers using Bangor as the boarding stage and Belfast as the alighting stage, and vice-versa. The statistics do not include passengers boarding/alighting at intermediate stops. In addition some ticket classes are excluded, e.g. Pupil Passes.

Ulsterbus

	Passenger Journeys		
Year	**Boarding Bangor**	**Alighting Bangor**	**Total**
2011/12	505,221	646,052	1,151,273
2010/11	509,255	632,980	1,142,235
2009/10	532,752	671,171	1,203,923
2008/09	565,715	756,055	1,321,769
2007/08	626,787	677,170	1,303,957

NIR

	Passenger Journeys		
Year	**Boarding Bangor**	**Alighting Bangor**	**Total**
2011/12	883,671	489,913	1,373,583
2010/11	853,473	475,459	1,328,932
2009/10	859,541	467,585	1,327,126
2008/09	888,513	434,149	1,322,662
2007/08	851,180	412,170	1,263,350

Public Transport: Enterprise Rail Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to address the falling passenger numbers using the Enterprise Rail Service.
(AQW 19501/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that passenger numbers on the Enterprise service are increasing. In the year to date (April 2012 to January 2013 inclusive) passenger numbers are over 700,000, 14.2% higher than the same period in the previous year.

As regards longer term investment, in January, I launched a public consultation on what should be the priorities for future capital expenditure in our railways network. This included an option for enhancement of the cross-border line and the Enterprise service. I look forward to receiving views.

DSD: Capital Spend

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's capital spend since May 2011, broken down by constituency area.
(AQW 19516/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Neither my Department nor its arm's-length bodies, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), maintain detailed analysis of spend on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, where reasonable and without disproportionate cost, business areas have reviewed expenditure records to identify any key areas of spend in each constituency. This information is set out below.

Roads Service

Roads Service has invested around £260 million on major capital schemes in the period from May 2011 to December 2012.

Roads Service does maintain an analysis of its expenditure on a full financial year basis by council area. This analysis is only produced after the end of each financial year. The table below details the capital expenditure in the period 2011-12.

District Council	Capital Year 11/12
Antrim	4,361
Coleraine	4,254
Limavady	4,003
Moyle	1,568
Ballymoney	2,425
Londonderry	11,099
Ballymena	5,387
Larne	5,913
Belfast	11,890
Castlereagh	1,573
Newtownabbey	3,535
Carrickfergus	2,457
North Down	3,145
Lisburn	4,934
Ards	5,405
Armagh	11,828
Newry & Mourne	7,380
Banbridge	4,451
Craigavon	6,273
Down	4,899
Magherafelt	3,216
Omagh	18,939
Strabane	4,969
Cookstown	3,778
Fermanagh	12,405
Dungannon	7,573
Overall Total	**157,660**

Roads Service does not simply split its total budget for capital expenditure on roads across all the district council areas. Major road improvements are prioritised on a countrywide basis taking account of a broad range of criteria such as strategic planning policy, traffic flow, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact, accessibility and value for money. While the actual spend on a major works scheme may be within one district council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the district council, constituency or county in which they are located.

Roads Service is currently engaged in numerous individual schemes, and while it is not possible to specify these individually Roads Service does provide progress reports to District Councils bi-annually. A link to the council reports can be found at:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

The 2012-2013 Spring Reports to council detail the outcomes achieved in the 2011-2012 financial year, and scheduled future activities. Autumn reports to council outline progress to date, and projected activities in future years.

Roads Service is currently engaged in taking forward major strategic investment in the roads network by providing dual carriageways on sections of the A5 between Londonderry and Strabane and Omagh and Ballygawley, on the A8 between Belfast and Larne and at Shore Road, Greenisland.

Transport

The Department has invested around £138 million on public transport schemes in the period from May 2011 to December 2012.

My Department has provided and will continue to provide capital funding for public transport services and initiatives, including the new buses and trains. The entire Translink network benefits from the impact of the New Trains project and the new Goldline vehicles and provision of Wi-Fi on both Goldline vehicles and trains.

The following table lists those projects that have a projected cost greater than £5m and provides details of expenditure for those projects during 2011-12 and up to December 2012.

Transport Projects	Constituency	2011-12 Spend £m	2012-13 Spend to December £m
Purchase of 35 Goldlines	All	7.487	0.312
Purchase of 30 Metro Double Decks	Belfast region	3.509	1.007
Purchase of 14 Double Decks	Belfast region	1.748	0.872
Clean Urban Transport – 39 Goldlines	All		9.064
Clean Urban Transport – 14 Double Deck	Belfast Region		2.620
Building Services Upgrade	All	0.689	0.377
New Trains	All	50.721	0.721
Adelaide Train Care Facility	South Belfast	16.753	1.012
Platform Extensions	All	4.790	0.628
Class 3000 Overhaul Programme	All	2.239	1.580
Enterprise Phase 3 Overhaul	Newry & Armagh, Lagan Valley and Upper Bann	0.044	0.034
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Safety Improvements	East Londonderry and Foyle	3.343	1.335
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Renewals Phase 1	East Londonderry and Foyle	3.802	13.381
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Renewals Phase 2	East Londonderry and Foyle	0.075	0.427
West Lisburn Halt Park and Ride	Lagan Valley	0.004	0.010
Newry Railway Station	Newry & Armagh	0.476	0.0

Northern Ireland Water (NIW)

My Department provides funding for NIW's capital works programme. NIW has invested around £240 million on major capital schemes in the period from May 2011 to December 2012. Details of investment in individual projects, where total project costs are greater than £5 million, are set out in the table below. Expenditure on minor capital projects is not included as it could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Water	Constituency	2011-12 Spend £m	2012-13 Spend to December £m
Tardree Zone Watermain Improvementss	North & East Antrim	1.112	0.776
Moyola Zone Watermain Improvements	Mid Ulster	2.555	0.743
Ballydougan to Newry Main Link Reinforcement	Newry & Armagh, South Down, Upper Bann	5.859	4.121
Strule Intake For Derg Water Treatment Works	West Tyrone	1.506	3.430
Newtownabbey Zone Watermain Improvements Phase 2	East Antrim and South Antrim	1.420	1.769
Ballintemple Zone Watermain Improvements	Newry and Armagh	3.296	3.730
Lough Ross Zone Watermain Improvements	Newry and Armagh	4.671	0.166

Northern Ireland Water	Constituency	2011-12 Spend £m	2012-13 Spend to December £m
Newry watermain improvements Phase 2	Newry and Armagh, South Down	1.346	2.709
Whitehead, Ballystruder & Ballycarry Rationalisation	East Antrim	6.574	0
Keady Wastewater Treatment Works	Newry and Armagh	2.249	0.601
Benone Area Sewerage	East Londonderry	1.337	4.525
Newtownbreda Wastewater Treatment Works	South Belfast	2.054	0.137
Ballyhalbert Wastewater Treatment Works Interim Solution	Strangford	0.687	3.686
Ballynahinch Wastewater Treatment Works	South Down	0.538	2.523
Newcastle Wastewater Treatment Works	South Down	1.638	5.745
Newry Wastewater Treatment Works Extension	Newry and Armagh	2.265	2.470

A4 Dual Carriageway

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to what extent noise levels have increased since the A4 was upgraded to a dual carriageway.
(AQW 19552/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his related Assembly Written Question (AQW 19445/11-15 refers) on this issue.

Street Lighting

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the rationale behind Roads Service's removal of street lighting in the Galliagh area of Derry.
(AQW 19898/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is currently in the process of carrying out street lighting improvements in the Galliagh area of Londonderry, specifically at Ederowen Park, Brookdale Park and Gallaigh Park.

All existing lighting is currently being replaced, with the exception of the lighting on rear pathways, which is being removed in accordance with current Roads Service policy in relation to street lighting provision.

Department for Social Development

Employment and Support Allowance

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of (i) Employment Support Allowances appeals since the introduction of the new benefit; and (ii) successful appeals, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 19061/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The information cannot be provided in the format sought. The Appeals Service (TAS) arranges for Employment Support Allowance (ESA) appeals to be heard at venues throughout Northern Ireland. The selection of venues for appeal hearings is determined by the postal district within which the appellant resides. The data is only available by appeal hearing venue. Furthermore, any appeal lodged with the Social Security Agency is subject to reconsideration and may therefore not progress to TAS. Appeals may not be dealt with in the same year that they are received.

The Chairman of the Tribunal records whether the decision made on appeal was either more or less advantageous than a previous decision. A more advantageous decision may increase the allowance or direct that a new award be made. A less advantageous decision may reduce the allowance or make no change to the original determination.

The following tables detail the number of ESA appeals received by TAS since the introduction of the benefit on 27 October 2008 up to 31 December 2012 (Table 1); while the number of ESA appeals that have received a final determination/outcome and how many were successful is set out in Table 2. Although a small number of ESA appeals were received in the 2008/09 financial year, none were determined until the 2009/10 year.

Table 1. ESA Appeals Received (By Financial Year / Tribunal District)

Tribunal District	27/10/08 - 31/03/09	01/04/09 - 31/03/10	01/04/10 - 31/03/11	01/04/11 - 31/03/12	01/04/12 - 31/12/12
Armagh	0	123	174	195	184
Ballymena	1	209	327	484	606
Ballymoney	0	60	78	95	115
Banbridge	0	62	112	147	162
Belfast	4	1153	1796	2692	2686
Coleraine	1	177	262	336	308
Cookstown	1	77	101	93	132
Craigavon	3	306	420	549	563
Downpatrick	1	130	177	318	282
Dungannon	1	137	248	295	329
Enniskillen	0	140	277	339	244
Limavady	0	91	93	140	171
Londonderry	0	231	371	560	658
Magherafelt	1	110	171	186	192
Newry	1	237	335	442	538
Newtownards	2	171	301	442	441
Omagh	2	136	202	296	261
Strabane	0	58	93	164	173
Total	**18**	**3608**	**5538**	**7773**	**8045**

Table 2. ESA Appeals - Outcome Decisions (By Financial Year / Tribunal District)

Tribunal District	1st April 2009 - 31st March 2010		1st April 2010 - 31st March 2011		1st April 2011 - 31st March 2012		1st April 2012 - 31st December 2012	
	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous
Armagh	44	8	178	45	150	43	174	55
Ballymena	85	23	313	82	398	116	458	141
Ballymoney	22	6	79	21	72	35	75	22
Banbridge	15	5	113	29	114	29	117	32
Belfast	492	121	1732	471	2054	705	2154	690
Coleraine	88	24	223	49	259	67	224	66
Cookstown	33	10	98	36	88	25	106	35
Craigavon	123	40	333	107	479	163	438	144
Downpatrick	57	21	173	53	224	66	213	73
Dungannon	55	19	183	44	292	105	217	62
Enniskillen	45	10	210	74	292	129	209	76
Limavady	32	12	107	46	120	60	123	41
Londonderry	90	33	312	136	505	235	430	180
Magherafelt	45	12	131	24	189	59	138	45
Newry	64	20	343	84	369	89	276	85

Tribunal District	1st April 2009 - 31st March 2010		1st April 2010 - 31st March 2011		1st April 2011 - 31st March 2012		1st April 2012 - 31st December 2012	
	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous	Final Outcome	More Advant-ageous
Newtownards	76	28	270	84	324	106	353	120
Omagh	67	23	148	45	270	112	187	73
Strabane	24	9	89	31	119	49	159	68
Grand Total	**1457**	**424**	**5035**	**1461**	**6318**	**2193**	**6051**	**2008**

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what is the (i) target; and (ii) average actual time for appeals of Employment Support Allowance cases from the date of submission to a tribunal decision being made.
(AQW 19279/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are a number of distinct processes involved in the handling of any appeal, including Employment and Support Allowance appeals. The first stage is that handled by the Social Security Agency and extends from receipt of an appeal until a submission is made to The Appeals Service. The Social Security Agency's 2012/13 actual average clearance time target for Employment and Support Allowance appeals is 45 days.

The second stage is that handled by The Appeals Service and starts from its receipt of an appeal submission from the Agency. The Appeals Service has an administrative target relating to the listing of an appeal, which is that the first hearing will be within eight weeks of its receipt of an appeal submission. This target does not include the period from hearing to decision being made, which is the responsibility of independent judicial office holders. The average performance by The Appeals Service against its 8 week target for the period April to December 2012 was 9 weeks.

There is no composite target covering all stages, however The Appeals Service also measures the average time from its receipt of an appeal submission to the date a Notice of Decision is produced for issue to the appellant. The average performance in relation to Employment and Support Allowance appeals for the period April to December 2012 was 13 weeks. It is also worth noting that Employment and Support Allowance payments continue to be paid at the assessment rate pending the outcome of the appeal.

Full-time or Part-time Education: Benefit Recipients

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the opportunities or schemes available for people who are living on benefits to enter either full-time or part-time education without losing their full benefit entitlement.
(AQW 19330/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance scheme is targeted at students, aged 16 years to 19 years, from lower income families, who wish to continue their studies, post-compulsory school age. Students who are deemed "independent", for the purposes of assessing household income, including students in care, and living in their own/ rented accommodation and receiving income support, can avail of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland.

Further Education colleges offer a range of part-time further education courses, suitable to develop the job prospects and life chances of those in receipt of benefits. Concessionary fees are available for these courses, on a means-tested basis, which reflects learners' ability to pay.

Whether or not a claimant can retain their entitlement to benefit while undertaking a course of study is determined by the type of benefit they are receiving and whether the course of study is classed as full or part-time by the relevant educational establishment. The course of study being undertaken must be at a recognised educational establishment and it is the classification of the course by that establishment, rather than the number of hours that the person actually attends it, which will determine the effect on their benefit.

Rent Arrears

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what was the (i) highest; (ii) lowest; and (iii) average level of rent arrears in 2012.
(AQW 19347/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The position at 30 December 2012 is as follows: In relation to (i) the highest individual level of rent arrears was £20,800; (ii) the lowest level of individual rent arrears was 1p; and (iii) the average level of Housing Executive rent arrears was £467.78.

Note: The majority of large rent arrears were not caused by the non payment of rent but historically were due to tenants receiving Housing Benefit that they were not entitled to, which created a Housing Benefit overpayment.

Social Housing

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development how many of the social houses built during the last five years were allocated to members of the (i) Protestant; and (ii) Roman Catholic community.
(AQW 19411/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below, provided by the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, details the allocation of 'self contained' social houses built in the last five years to members of the (i) Protestant; and (ii) Roman Catholic community: -

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
Protestant	276	289	319	493	267	1644
Roman Catholic	577	651	753	657	723	3361

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development whether he plans to seek Executive approval for Northern Ireland specific legislation on Asset Transfer to ensure parity with the rest of the UK.
(AQW 19451/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The need for new legislation to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland is being considered by a cross-Departmental Steering Group, supported by research and analysis and early consultation with key stakeholders.

There are important lessons to be learned from policy and practice elsewhere and my officials will ensure that the policy development process in Northern Ireland is informed by that experience.

The Steering Group will make recommendations for policy options in Northern Ireland which may have implications for legislation. The ultimate decision on whether or not legislation is necessary will rest with the Executive.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development when he will complete his Programme for Government commitment on Asset Transfer and consult publicly on a new policy.
(AQW 19452/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The development of a policy framework to support Community Asset Transfer will contribute to the overall Programme for Government commitment to "invest in social enterprise growth to increase sustainability in the broad community sector".

A cross-departmental steering group, led by DSD, is currently considering options and developing policy proposals. I expect this steering group to bring forward proposals in April which I will share with my Executive colleagues before seeking wider views through a process of public consultation.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development how many times the cross-departmental committee on Asset Transfer has met; and when it will report.
(AQW 19453/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The community asset transfer policy framework steering group has met twice with further meetings planned in March and April. I expect the steering group to bring forward proposals in April.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the Carnegie UK Trust research on The Enabling State; and whether he plans to follow its advice on Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19454/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Community Asset Transfer was identified in the Concordat between the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Northern Ireland Government as a means of achieving a range of community development outcomes.

The Carnegie UK Trust discussion paper identifies that the community management of assets can be a means of growing capacity and harnessing local ambition and potential. I consider that this supports the rationale for identifying Community

Asset Transfer in the Programme for Government as a means of investing in social enterprise to increase sustainability in the broad community sector.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded report "Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland has formed an important part of the evidence base for a Northern Ireland policy framework for Community Asset Transfer and I would expect the report to inform the work of the cross-departmental steering group which I have established to develop policy proposals.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will publish a strategy on Community Asset Transfer to comply with his Programme for Government commitment.
(AQW 19456/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The development of a policy framework to support Community Asset Transfer has been identified by my Department as a means of achieving the Programme for Government commitment to "invest in social enterprise growth to increase sustainability in the broad community sector".

A cross-departmental steering group, led by DSD, is currently considering options and developing policy proposals. I expect this steering group to bring forward proposals in April which I will share with my Executive colleagues prior to seeking wider views through a process of public consultation.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has met the Joseph Rowntree Trust to discuss its research on Asset Transfer in the UK.
(AQW 19457/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not met with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) although my officials attended the launch of the JRF-funded report "Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland" and have on previous occasions met with the authors of this report.

The findings and conclusions from this research form an important part of the evidence base for a Northern Ireland policy framework for Community Asset Transfer and I would expect the report to inform the work of the cross-departmental steering group which I have established to develop policy proposals.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the use of Asset Transfer in regeneration; and how he will guard against liability transfer.
(AQW 19458/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Community Asset Transfer has been identified in the Programme for Government as a means of investing in social enterprise to increase sustainability in the broad community sector.

Risk management is an important part of Community Asset Transfer and extensive guidance has been developed elsewhere in the UK which will be useful to inform policy and practice in Northern Ireland.

The transfer of individual assets will in all cases need to be supported by an appropriate business case which would demonstrate sustainability. Community Asset Transfer can take different forms and will vary from case to case. The nature of the asset, the proposed plans for the asset and the capacity of the receiving organisation would all be important factors in ensuring the viability of the plan and transfer.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the responses on Asset Transfer that he has received from each Executive Department; and to publish the asset map arising.
(AQW 19459/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I invited all my Executive Colleagues to nominate officials to join a steering group to oversee the process of developing a policy framework for Community Asset Transfer. A steering group has been established with broad representation and is currently considering options and developing proposals. The steering group includes a representative from the Strategic Investment Board's Asset Management Unit which was established by the Executive with a remit to develop and deliver:

- a region-wide Asset Management Strategy
- departmental Asset Management Plans
- mandating ePIMS (electronic Property Information Mapping System) as a central asset database

However, the remit of the steering group itself is not to consider individual assets. The work of the steering group will result in policy proposals and will not generate an 'asset map'.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development what representations he has received on Community Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19460/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been aware for some time of the support from the voluntary and community sector for the development of Community Asset Transfer.

My officials have already engaged with a range of stakeholders from central and local government and the third sector and conducted a number of policy development workshops in November 2012 to explore specific issues and support the work of the Steering Group.

My department is also working with the Development Trusts Northern Ireland (DTNI) as a key delivery partner to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer policy. DTNI will engage separately with stakeholders to inform recommendations to the steering group on aspects of implementation and will also deliver a programme of awareness raising and training on Community Asset Transfer beginning next year.

I intend to commence consultation publicly on policy proposals before the summer recess.

Window Replacement Schemes: Hinges

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to address concerns on the provision of hinges for window replacement schemes.
(AQW 19467/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the specification of hinges currently used by the Housing Executive and their plans to change the specification. I have met with industry representatives and my officials attended a meeting held between the manufacturers of the reversible hinged window and the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Housing Executive on the 5 February. I understand that the meeting was constructive and both parties explained their position. The Housing Executive explained the rationale behind its revised specification and the procurement strategy in respect of window replacement.

This is entirely an operational matter for the Housing Executive and neither I nor Departmental officials have any approval role if the Housing Executive decide to change a specification. In relation to the procurement for the window replacement requirements, the Housing Executive hope to commence this with an Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) notice later this month.

Housing Associations

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff employed by (i) Apex Housing Association; (ii) Trinity Housing; (iii) Fold Housing; (iv) Clanmill Housing; (v) Ulidia Housing; (vi) Helm Housing; and (vii) Oaklee Housing, broken down by (a) grade; and (b) salary.
(AQW 19502/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department does not hold any information about the number of employees in any Housing Associations or their grade or salary.

Social Housing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many departmental staff will be employed to oversee the new social housing proposals, broken down by grade; and what is the projected annual cost of staffing.
(AQW 19504/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is too early to say at this stage of the programme how many of my departmental staff will be utilised for the Social Housing Reform, my departmental officials are in the process of scoping the resources necessary to deliver the programme.

Currently there are 7 of my departmental staff employed on the delivery of the Social Housing Reform Programme in both a full-time and part-time basis. I have included a chart below detailing the breakdown of staffing by grade and the total annual cost for all staff involved in the programme.

Staff Grade	Number of Staff	Annual Total Cost 2012/2013
G3 (2 days per week)	1	
G5 (3 days per week)	1	
G6	1	
DP	2	
SO	1	

Staff Grade	Number of Staff	Annual Total Cost 2012/2013
EOII	1	
Total	**7**	**£354,000**

Social Housing: Rent Increases in Rinmore Drive, Creggan

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the rent increases for each of the 55 houses in the Rinmore and Creggan areas which transferred from the Housing Executive in the last 18 months.
(AQW 19505/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There was a total of 55 houses in Rinmore Drive, Creggan that transferred from the NIHE to Apex Housing Association. Of the 55 properties, 14 have had improvements completed with the rent charge increasing accordingly, 4 are currently undergoing improvements and the rent charge has not changed at this stage. Improvements to the remaining 37 properties have not yet commenced and the rent charge has also not changed.

The table below details the properties that have had improvements carried out with the amount charged in rent shown before and after improvements

Rinmore Drive

Reimproved Properties

No.	Improved Property Current Rent Charge £	Umimproved Previous Rent Charge £	
1	73.60	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
3	71.76	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
5	69.92	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
7	71.76	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
9	71.76	54.39	charges increased 11/06/12
11	71.76	54.39	charges increased 11/06/12
13	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
15	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
17	69.92	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
19			
21	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
23			
25	69.92	54.39	charges increased 05/11/12
27	69.92	54.39	charges increased 05/11/12
29	71.76	54.39	charges increased 19/11/12
31	71.76	54.39	charges increased 19/11/12

Reimprovement works not yet complete

No.	Current Rent Charge £	Previous Rent Charge £	
33	54.39	54.39	no increase in charge since 31/10/11
35	54.39	54.39	no increase in charge since 31/10/11
37	54.39	54.39	no increase in charge since 31/10/11
39	54.39	54.39	no increase in charge since 31/10/11

Note: the rent charge on the unimproved units was set by the Housing Executive in 2011/12 and will not be increased until the reimprovement works are completed.

Housing Benefit

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether the award of housing benefit will increase to match the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's rent increase in April 2013.
(AQW 19520/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that as the legislation on under-occupation in the social rented sector is unlikely to be in place from April 2013, any increase in Housing Executive rents in April will be matched by a corresponding increase in Housing Benefit.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development when he last met the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to discuss measuring poverty, future labour markets, the impact of welfare reform; and what was the outcome of the meeting.
(AQW 19525/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not met with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to discuss measuring poverty, future labour markets or the impact of welfare reform.

However, my officials, along with colleagues from other Departments, have met with JRF in relation to the development of the longer term approach to the Delivering Social Change (DSC) Framework. This Framework, as you are no doubt aware, has been established by the Executive to achieve a sustained reduction in poverty and disadvantage, and, as such, encompasses the issues you have raised in your question.

Officials will continue to keep in contact with JRF to exchange ideas and information as the work on DSC progresses.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will respond to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation publication by Queen's University Belfast on Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19528/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is not seeking formal responses to the report. However officials of my Department attended the launch of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation-funded report "Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland" and have on previous occasions met with the authors of this report.

The findings and conclusions from this research will be part of the evidence base for a Northern Ireland policy framework for Community Asset Transfer and I would expect the report to inform the work of the cross-departmental steering group which I have established to develop policy proposals.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will finalise his consultative paper on Asset Transfer for consultation.
(AQW 19529/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A cross-departmental steering group, led by DSD, is currently considering options and developing policy proposals to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland. I expect this steering group to bring forward proposals in April which I will share with my Executive colleagues prior to seeking wider views through a process of public consultation.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has made a decision on whether a stronger legislative framework is required to underpin his forthcoming community Asset Transfer strategy.
(AQW 19530/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The need for new legislation to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland is being considered by a cross-Departmental Steering Group, supported by research and analysis and early consultation with key stakeholders.

I am aware that legislation forms part of the enabling framework for Community Asset Transfer in the rest of the UK and there are important lessons to be learned from policy and practice elsewhere. My officials will ensure that the policy development process in Northern Ireland is informed by that experience.

The Steering Group will make recommendations for policy options in Northern Ireland which may have implications for legislation.

Asset Transfer

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development when he will seek Executive approval for a policy on Community Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19531/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A cross-departmental steering group, led by DSD, is currently considering options and developing policy proposals to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland. I expect this steering group to bring forward proposals in April which I will share with my Executive colleagues before seeking wider views through a process of public consultation.

Formal Executive approval of proposals will be sought following public consultation, when I have had the opportunity to consider the views and comments of stakeholders.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the potential for guidelines and policies alone to change the culture of the public sector on Asset Transfer.
(AQW 19532/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A cross-departmental steering group, led by DSD, is currently considering options and developing policy proposals. The need for new legislation to support Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland is being considered by a cross-Departmental Steering Group, supported by research and analysis and early consultation with key stakeholders.

In seeking to create a more enabling environment for Community Asset Transfer in Northern Ireland the steering group will be aiming to address current barriers to implementation, to raise the profile of Asset Transfer as an option and to increase capacity and skills within the public sector. The need for legislation will form part of this work.

In keeping with the general advice from the Office of the Legislative Counsel, legislation will be considered only where is it necessary in order to achieve outcomes which cannot be achieved by other means.

Gambling: Operator Licence

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development what are the potential consequences of Northern Ireland not requiring remote gambling operators to obtain a licence, given the requirements in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 19533/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In the rest of the United Kingdom, remote gambling operators are only required to obtain a licence from the Gambling Commission if they are based in Great Britain. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport is currently consulting on an amendment to the law so that all remote gambling operators supplying consumers in Great Britain - regardless of where they are based - will be required to have a license.

In the Republic of Ireland, there is currently no requirement for remote gambling operators, whether based in the jurisdiction or targeting its consumers, to obtain a licence. Work on legislation, which will introduce a new regulatory and licensing regime, is currently underway and my Department is monitoring the progress of this.

In Northern Ireland, it is currently the case that remote gambling operators, based in the jurisdiction or targeting its consumers, are not required to obtain a licence. I am currently discussing this issue with the relevant DCMS Minister and the outcome of these discussions, along with the outcome of work currently being carried out by the European Commission will inform how online gambling, including its operators, will be regulated within Northern Ireland. If appropriate, provisions in respect of this will be included within the proposed Betting, Gaming Lotteries and Amusements Bill.

Gambling: Operator Licence

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of his Department's Review of Gambling, what concerns he has about Northern Ireland being the only part of the UK that will not require remote gambling operators to obtain a licence.
(AQW 19534/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the member to the answer previously supplied to AQW 19533/11-15.

Gambling: Online Betting

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development what provision his Department is considering for the protection of consumers who bet online.
(AQW 19535/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the member to the answer previously supplied to AQW 19415/11-15.

Asset Transfer

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development what training and capability-building his Department will provide to voluntary and community organisations on Asset Transfer and building better capacity.
(AQW 19536/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department is funding the Development Trusts Northern Ireland as a key delivery partner to support the implementation of Community Asset Transfer policy. They will advise on the level of both monetary and non-monetary support required to facilitate successful Community Asset Transfer and will develop and deliver resources tailored to Northern Ireland circumstances. This will include awareness raising, practical advice, training and active support for a number of demonstration projects.

Housing Executive: Value of Housing Stock

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what is the total value of the Housing Executive's housing stock.
(AQW 19537/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that at 31 March 2012 the total value of their housing stock was £3,335,134,000. However, it should be noted this is not the value that could be realised from transferring the stock as social housing.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what length of warranty is given on boilers fitted to homes under departmental warm home projects, such as those fitted by Eaga.
(AQW 19585/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Warm Homes Scheme is delivered on behalf of the Department for Social Development by Bryson Charitable Group and H&A Mechanical Services. Both Scheme Managers offer a 2 year warranty on their boilers, as required by the Technical Specification section of the contract documents. They also offer a 1 year warranty on the heating installations.

EAGA offered a 2 year warranty on the workmanship on their heating installations during The Warm Homes Scheme between 1st June 2001 and 30th June 2009.

Social Housing: Building Standards

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale for removing the requirement that all new social housing is built to a minimum of Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3; and what impact this will have on fuel poverty.
(AQW 19592/11-15)

Mr McCausland: From this financial year, my Department has removed the mandatory requirement that all new social housing should be built to at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, in favour of improved building regulations which came into operation in October 2012.

Some aspects of the Code placed unnecessary prescriptive specifications on housing associations that in some cases added considerably to construction costs and stifled innovation. The new building regulations now cover those elements of the Code that the Department considers essential, in particular those relating to thermal efficiencies and carbon reductions. Both are required to bear down on fuel poverty which is a key issue for my Department.

Part F - 'conservation of fuel and power' - of the new building regulations represent thermal efficiencies and carbon reductions of 25% over and above the previous 2006 levels. Critically, these new levels are broadly comparable to those in Level 3 of the Code, so that the impact on fuel poverty is maintained.

The position now is that standards for social housing have been harmonised with those for private housing development.

Whilst building to Level 3 is no longer mandatory, I have retained the option to build to this specification and additional grant is available for those housing associations who wish to do so.

North Down: Disabled Facilities Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of applications for Disabled Facilities Grant in the North Down area since 2010; (ii) the number that were rejected; (iii) the number accepted; and (iv) the number awaiting a decision.
(AQW 19610/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) applications in the North Down Council area for the period 1 April 2010 to 31 January 2013, 188 were received. Of these; 63 were cancelled,42 were approved and 83 are pending.

*The Housing Executive has advised that a DFG is a mandatory grant which is means tested and is available for works recommended by an Occupational Therapist. If it has been cancelled, it is at the applicant's request only. They also advise they do not reject DFG applications; however applicants must go through a Test of Resources before proceeding.

North Down: Economic Regeneration

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the economic regeneration projects funded in each Neighbourhood Renewal Area of North Down, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19615/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is one Neighbourhood Renewal Area in North Down - the Kilcooley Neighbourhood in Bangor. Details of the economic regeneration projects, that have been funded over the last three years are as follows:

Project name	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Kilcooley Healthy Living Centre Social Economy Project	£0.00	£0.00	£95,159.12
Kilcooley Women's Centre Step - Training and job preparation Project	£45,369.00	£44,289.32	£45,100.32

DSD: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19630/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total spend on hospitality in my Department in the 2011-12 financial year was £23,374.97

Welfare Reform: Work Capability Assessment

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider any changes to the medical assessment process for benefits in light of the comments made by the Chair of the Westminster Public Accounts Committee, that the view of the Department of Works and Pensions that appeals against decisions of medical assessments for benefit entitlement are an inherent part of the process was an unduly complacent view.
(AQW 19650/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Work Capability Assessment process has been developed with the support of healthcare professionals and the involvement of a number of different charities. In accordance with the legislative requirement set out in Section 10 of the Welfare Reform Act (Northern Ireland) 2007, has to date conducted three reviews of the Work Capability Assessment process, the latest of which was laid before the Assembly in November 2012. A further independent review is planned for 2013.

Improvements made to date include the recent changes to the cancer descriptors, changes to forms, changes to training for Health Care Professionals, introduction of increased customer contact through pre-disallowance calls and the introduction of Mental Health Function Champions.

The right to appeal is a legislative requirement for the majority of social security benefits, including Employment and Support Allowance, and therefore an inherent part of resolving any dispute between an individual and my Department about their entitlement to a social security benefit.

Volunteering Strategy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has any plans to engage formally with the volunteering sector as part of his review of delivery support arrangements.
(AQW 19680/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In order to successfully implement Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy I am committed to ensuring that there is effective infrastructure support for volunteering. My officials are presently developing options for this infrastructure support for my consideration. Officials will be meeting with existing providers during February to discuss any proposed new arrangements which I expect to be put in place later this year. Until then existing funding arrangements will be rolled forward to ensure the continued support for volunteering.

Volunteering Strategy

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timeframe to which his Department is working to in the review of delivery support arrangements for the voluntary sector.
(AQW 19681/11-15)

Mr McCausland: New Regional Infrastructure Support arrangements came into effect from October 2012. Under the new arrangements generic infrastructure support will be provided to the Voluntary and Community Sector by a consortium comprising NICVA, Community Evaluation Northern Ireland, Rural Community Network and CO3. Support will also be provided for the faith sector through Churches Community Work Alliance and for the voluntary advice sector through a consortium comprising of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Advice NI and the Law Centre.

Interim support is being provided for volunteering and for women in disadvantaged and rural areas until new arrangements are developed. I expect the new arrangements in these areas to be put in place later this year.

Housing Executive

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many agency staff were employed in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each month of the last two years.
(AQW 19704/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the number of agency staff employed by them, by month, in the last two years is shown in the table below:

Month	2011/12	2012/13
April	49	123
May	59	151
June	69	143
July	64	138
August	66	143
September	78	147
October	77	184
November	79	233
December	88	249
January	96	296
February	112	-
March	116	-

The Housing Executive employ Agency staff due to significant urgent resourcing needs which arose for issues such as;

- the need for Technical staff to meet the demands of an increase in their Planned Maintenance programme;
- the need for Housing Maintenance Officers and administrative staff to meet an increase in work arising from the introduction of new Response Maintenance Contracts; and
- the ongoing need to resource the administration of Housing Benefit.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Northern Ireland Housing Executive policy regarding the use of agency staff.
(AQW 19705/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that where a resourcing need arises of an urgent, short term, temporary or unknown duration, at entry level grade or for specific specialist posts, they will seek to meet that need either through a temporary employment contract or through engaging the services of an agency worker. Where these circumstances arise, agency workers are managed within the provisions of the agency workers regulations.

Social Housing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what is the estimated cost of (i) transferring the Housing Executive's housing stock to the Housing Associations; and (ii) the establishment of a new Regional Housing Body, including any redundancies which may arise.
(AQW 19708/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My proposals are a high level vision and provide a strategic direction of travel which the Executive has agreed to explore. Going forward, as part of the detailed design phase, the cost of the proposed new structures will be explored. This will involve further analysis including financial consideration, economic appraisals and engagement with key stakeholders.

Therefore, at this early stage, I am unable to provide an estimated cost for transferring the Housing Executive stock and the establishment of a new Regional Housing Body.

Social Housing: Empty Dwellings

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has carried out an assessment of empty dwellings, including the number, quality and value of the stock.
(AQW 19709/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A pilot exercise to test the effectiveness and cost of various interventions was carried out in the Fortwilliam and Upper Newtownards Road areas of Belfast. This pilot showed that there is a lack of accurate information about the number of empty homes. My officials are currently preparing a new Empty Homes Strategy and are working with colleagues in the Department of Finance and Personnel to address this shortfall.

Social Housing: Empty Dwellings

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has considered introducing a compulsory purchase scheme or compulsory possession scheme to bring empty dwellings back into use.
(AQW 19710/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has a variety of powers that it can use in relation to empty homes. These range from the issue of a repair notice (Article 41 of the 1981 Housing order) to having the power to take possession of unoccupied houses (Article 60 of the 1981 Housing Order).

One of the aims of the Empty Homes Strategy and action plan which is currently being developed will be to look at the effectiveness of the current legislation and if required bring forward proposals for legislative change.

DSD: Civil Servants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of civil servants in his Department, and the public sector organisations funded by his Department, who have (i) been made redundant; and (ii) involuntarily lost their jobs in each of the last two years.
(AQW 19711/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No civil servants have been made redundant in my Department during the 2010/11 or 2011/12 financial years. Although no staff were made compulsorily redundant in the public sector organisations funded by my Department, in 2010/11 two staff in the Housing Executive volunteered for redundancy and were released.

During the 2010/11 financial year a total of 40 civil servants in my Department were dismissed. In addition, a total of 32 staff were dismissed from the Housing Executive.

During the 2011/12 financial year a total of 25 civil servants in my Department were dismissed. In addition, a total of 27 staff were dismissed from the Housing Executive and Ilex.

Alcohol Licensing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how many responses to the consultation on alcohol licensing are advocating closing times for pubs and clubs beyond 2.00am.
(AQW 19715/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The public consultation on “Proposed changes to the law regulating the sale and supply of alcohol in Northern Ireland” attracted wide interest within the community with over 2500 responses received. The vast majority of responses were from members of the public, with 140 responses received from organisations, including drinks industry groups, retailers, health bodies, local alcohol advice services, councils, political parties, charities and faith groups.

It is important that officials carefully consider the various views on the wide range of proposals in the consultation, including the proposal to introduce occasional late opening which will extend late opening hours to 2.00am.

Due to the high response to the consultation it is taking longer than normal for officials to finalise a draft report on the outcome of the consultation. I have asked for a draft report to be with me by the end of February and it will be discussed with the Social Development Committee before I decide the way forward.

When the report is finalised I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Homelessness: People in Temporary Accommodation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down are registered as living in temporary accomodation.
(AQW 19722/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the table below details the number of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive in response to their homelessness duties in their Bangor District Office area at 12 February 2013.

Household type	NIHE Hostel	Voluntary Sector Hostel	Private Sector	Total
Singles	2	8	10	20
Families	4	2	13	19
Total	**6**	**10**	**23**	**39**

It is important to note that there are other self referral hostels in Bangor which the Housing Executive would not be aware of.

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Disability Living Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down have been in receipt of Disability Living Allowance in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 19723/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of Disability Living Allowance recipients in North Down in each year from August 2003 to August 2012.

Year	*DLA Recipients
Aug-03	4,110
Aug-04	4,360
Aug-05	4,540
Aug-06	4,710
Aug-07	4,860
Aug-08	4,930
Aug-09	5,030
Aug-10	5,220
Aug-11	5,340
Aug-12	5,540

* The figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

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Social Housing: Heating Upgrade Schemes

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the heating upgrade schemes that the Housing Executive has planned for the Derry City Council area in 2013/14; and whether funding has been secured for all the planned schemes.
(AQW 19752/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- Benevenagh, Blighs Gardens/Lane 86 dwellings
- Ederowen/Elaghmore 62 dwellings
- Waterside Heating (addresses to be confirmed) 75 dwellings

Funding is in place for these schemes, however the Waterside heating scheme has a current Date of Possession (DOP) of March 2014 and is unlikely to account for significant expenditure in 2013/14, unless it can be advanced within the programme.

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Housing Benefit

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to account for the difference in the number of housing benefit claimants between The Mount area of East Belfast, which had 1380 claimants in June 2012, and the Gilnahirk area of East Belfast, which had 40 claimants in June 2012.
(AQW 19769/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive does not hold information on the number of Housing Benefit claimants on the geographic basis set out in the question. They advise that The Mount is part of their East Belfast District which has a total of 7,627 Housing Benefit claimants; and Gilnahirk is part of their Castlereagh District which has a total of 4,109 Housing Benefit claimants.

The Housing Executive further advises that, in general terms, differences between the levels of Housing Benefit uptake in different areas depends on a number of factors including population levels, housing density, housing tenure types and income levels

Welfare Reform

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of Welfare Reform on the level of benefit claimants, given that in April 2012 40.3 percent of all constituents, aged 16 years and over, in East Belfast were claiming at least one social security benefit.
(AQW 19770/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Welfare reform will simplify and streamline the current benefits' system introducing 'Universal Credit' as a single working age benefit to replace Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance. Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance for working age people.

The impact on the level of benefit claimants will not be fully known until Universal Credit is implemented, however it is expected that due to the claim process being simplified with a single claim being made to one organisation, Universal Credit may improve benefit take-up compared to the current levels and taking account of the existing range of benefits. Each person will be assessed, taking account of individual circumstances and as now, awards will be made on the basis of entitlement.

Entitlement e.g. to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), will be based on how a person's condition affects their daily life, not the underlying condition itself as this may impact differently from person to person. This new benefit will have a better balance to take into account the needs of those with mental health, intellectual, cognitive and developmental impairments. Through greater use of evidence, periodic review and reassessment the intention is that the new benefit will enable a more accurate assessment of an individual's ongoing entitlement to make sure support is reaching those who need it most.

The impact on the level of benefit claimants for those currently in receipt of DLA and who might in the future have entitlement to PIP is not yet fully known however it is intended that the first of two planned independent reviews of the PIP assessment will be completed by the end of 2014. This will allow for any findings to be considered, and any necessary changes made before the majority of Disability Living Allowance recipients begin to be reassessed from October 2015.

Social Housing: Maintenance Schemes

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) kitchen; (ii) window; and (iii) external cyclical maintenance schemes that have been carried out in (a) the Shankill ward; (ii) the Glencairn ward; (iii) the Highfield ward; and (iv) North Belfast, in each of the last three years and this year to date; and the cost of each scheme.
(AQW 19773/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency or by Council Ward. However, the table below details all planned maintenance schemes for the Housing Executive's Shankill and North Belfast District Office areas in each of the last three years and the current financial year, including the estimated cost of each scheme.

Year	Scheme Type	Scheme Name	Estimated Cost
2009/10	**North Belfast**		
	Ext Cyclic Maint	Fairhill/Waveney	£446,504
	Ext Cyclic Maint	Mount Vernon/Ross House	£252,200
	Kitchens	Brookfield/Butler/Elmfield	£488,165
	Kitchens	Glenrosa	£350,743
	Kitchens	Ballybone Phase 1/2	£351,969
	Kitchens	Midland/Duncairn Phase 2	£169,845
	Kitchens	Ashfield Court	£363,156
	Kitchens	The Bone Phase 3	£330,104
	Shankill		
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Agnes/Berlin Streets	£972,969

Year	Scheme Type	Scheme Name	Estimated Cost
2010/11	**North Belfast**		
	Ext Cyclic Maint	Graymount/Parkmount/ Downview	£490,356
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Jamaica/Havanna	£276,323
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	White City Ph1 Windows	£243,999
	Kitchens	Skegoniel Kitchens	£281,084
	Shankill		
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Berlin/Cambrai	£778,771
	Kitchens	West Circular	£313,948
	Kitchens	Ainsworth	£302,952
	Kitchens	Lawnbrook / Upper Shankill	£556,969
2011/12	**North Belfast**		
	Double Glazing	Mountcollyer Windows	£63,005
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	White City Ph 2 Windows	£392,000
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Queen Victoria Garden Flats	£61,526
	Kitchens	Bruslee/Pinkerton	£451,569
	Kitchens	Silverstream/Ballysillan	£750,333
	Shankill		
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Glencairn Windows	£282,270
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Highfield Windows	£514,017
	Kitchens	Huss/Ashmore	£263,488
	Kitchens	Mid Shankill Phase 1	£277,298
	Kitchens	Lower Shankill	£498,463
2012/13	**North Belfast**		
	Double Glazing	Fairyknowe	£185,789
	Double Glazing	New Lodge Upper	£213,943
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	New Lodge Upper	£138,700
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Midland/Lower Duncairn	£121,959
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Lower Ligoniel/Glenbank	£223,384
	Kitchens	Tyndale/Silverstream	£656,229
	Kitchens	New Lodge Ex URA	£258,162
	Kitchens	Shore Crescent	£319,830
	Kitchens	White City	£678,438
	Shankill		
	Double Glazing	Woodvale/Donaldson	£298,108
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Woodvale/Twaddell	£289,688
	Ext Cyclic Maint.	Lower Shankill	£352,261
	Kitchens	Mid Shankill Phase 2	£490,621
	Kitchens	Mid Shankill Phase 3	£704,371
	Kitchens	Mid Shankill 4 Tudor	£323,897

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Social Housing: Cavity Walls

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes in Harpurs Hill and the Heights areas of Coleraine do not have cavity walls and are therefore prevented from getting cavity wall insulation.
(AQW 19785/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that their records indicate that they have 126 properties in Harpurs Hill and 62 properties in The Heights which do not have cavity walls.

Social Housing: Allocation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, if the proposed break up of the Housing Executive proceeds, who would have responsibility for allocating housing.
(AQW 19832/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Under the proposed new structures for social housing, the Regional Housing Body would be responsible for the administration of the social allocations policy and the independent assessment of need.

Housing Executive: Effect of Break-up on Staff

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of the proposed break up of the Housing Executive on its staff.
(AQW 19833/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My proposals for new housing structures are about providing a better service for tenants, better quality housing and also a structure and a sustainable system that ensures good value for money for the taxpayer. This is not about cutting back or saving money and is not about cutting jobs.

We are at the early stage of a major project and there is still much work to be done with the design of the new Social Housing structures. It is not possible to be precise about the impacts on staff at this early stage, but there can be no doubt, that the reform of Social Housing structures will have implications for existing staff within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

However, it is important to stress that the functions that are currently carried out by the Housing Executive are functions which will still have to be carried out, grants will still have to be awarded, properties will still have to be managed; all of those different functions will still take place under the new structures and it will require staff to do so. I want to stress that this is a restructuring process: the vast majority of staff in the Housing Executive will continue to deliver the services they currently deliver, albeit within a different organisation.

My Department and I remain committed to working closely with the NIHE Board, Housing Executive Staff and NIPSA throughout this process. Indeed, shortly after the issue of my written statement, departmental officials held an initial meeting with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Director of Personnel & Management Services to address primary staff concerns and to agree to work jointly to allay staff anxieties. Both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and DSD officials will continue to engage with NIPSA as the representative of the vast majority of staff in the Housing Executive on the new structures.

Social Housing: Cavity Walls

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of housing executive properties in the Lagan Valley constituency that do not have cavity walls.
(AQW 19840/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the Housing Executive's records indicate the following numbers and locations within its Lisburn and Banbridge District office areas that do not have cavity walls:

- 17 Aluminium Bungalows at Barley Hill, Lisburn
- 406 No Fines dwellings in Old Warren estate, Lisburn
- 141 Orlit dwellings in Knockmore estate, Lisburn
- 19 Aluminium Bungalows at Huntly, Banbridge
- 3 Aluminium Bungalows at Kiltarriff, Rathfriland
- 10 Aluminium Bungalows at Dunbarton, Woodlands
- 3 No Fines dwellings at Bodell Place, Seapatrick, Banbridge
- 3 Orlit dwellings at Dromara Road, Drone Hill Road and Killysorrell Road
- 14 Cross wall dwellings at Parkhill, Dromore *
- 8 Cross wall dwellings at Highfield gardens, Banbridge *
- 3 Cross wall dwellings at Maryville Park/Crescent, Banbridge *

* Cross wall dwellings can be cavity or non-cavity but the Housing Executive's records does not hold this information

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the options available to constituents to make payments to the Child Maintenance Enforcement Division (CMED); and whether CMED can compel people, who have a good payment history, to pay using a specific method.
(AQW 19844/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The most effective method of paying child maintenance is through a family based arrangement and the Child Maintenance Service promotes and supports parents to do this through the Child maintenance Choices Service.

When a family based arrangement is not possible an application is made to the statutory scheme. The preferred method of collection is then 'Maintenance Direct', whereby the child maintenance payments once assessed, are made directly to the parent with care by the non-resident parent.

Where this method of payment is not possible, the Child Maintenance Service has the legislative authority to select the most appropriate method of collection in any given circumstances. The use of direct debit or deductions from earnings orders provide the greatest level of assurance for the parent with care as these methods of collection are more automated and usually more compliant than other arrangements.

Jobs and Benefits Office Catchment Areas

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people living in the (i) Andersonstown Jobs & Benefits Office; (ii) North Belfast Jobs & Benefits Office; (iii) Falls Road Jobs & Benefits Office; (iv) Shaftesbury Square Jobs & Benefits Office; (v) Holywood Road Jobs & Benefits Office; (vi) Shankill Jobs & Benefits Office; (vii) Knockbreda Jobs & Benefits Office; (viii) Foyle Jobs & Benefits Office; and (ix) Lisnagelvin Jobs & Benefits Office catchment areas.
(AQW 19954/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available. The reason for this is that the boundaries of the Jobs & Benefits Offices do not overlap with any administrative geographies for which population figures are available.

Pay-as-you-go Oil Scheme

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the pilot Pay-As-You-Go oil scheme; and whether this scheme is to be extended throughout Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19958/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been working with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services on a pilot Pay as You Go for Oil system. The pilot commenced in February 2012 and the participants included Housing Executive tenants, householders who had been assisted through the Warm Homes Scheme and private referrals. The homes were in Dungannon, Coalisland, Newcastle and Camlough. The technology was installed in 17 low income households with the aim of testing the technology and the process. Carillion completed an evaluation of the pilot and the Housing Executive also completed an evaluation. The convenience of using the Pay as You Go for Oil system was highlighted as a major benefit. However, the results of the pilot survey were disappointing regarding the proportion of participants benefiting from lower oil costs.

There are two crucial issues around the cost and delivery of introducing a Pay as You Go Oil system into the Department's mainstream energy efficiency improvement schemes:

- costs associated with production and administration of the Pay as You Go Oil scheme; and
- who will supply the oil to the customer.

Departmental economists have serious concerns about the feasibility of the Pay as You Go Oil scheme from a cost/benefit perspective. I have considered all of the information available from the pilot and the opinion of the Departmental economists I have concluded that it is not feasible to introduce the Pay as You Go Oil scheme into my Department's energy efficiency improvements schemes.

Welfare Reform Legislation: Victims of the Troubles

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development whether special provision will be made for victims of the Troubles in the Welfare Reform legislation; and whether consideration is being given to having a disregard and compensation payment similar to that for the victims of the 2005 London bombings.
(AQW 19960/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The compensation payments made to the victims of the 2005 London bombings are disregarded for the purposes of income-related benefits and this will continue under Universal Credit which will replace the income-related benefits for working age people. These payments are disregarded for income-related benefit purposes as they are from a charitable source.

Payments to victims of the Troubles are made by the Victims and Survivors Service, based on individual assessed needs and the provision of high-quality services to meet those needs. The Victims and Survivors Service is currently set up as a

company limited by guarantee and payments made from it cannot be disregarded for income-related benefit purposes as they are not from a charitable source.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are exemptions in the Welfare Reform Bill for members of (i) the armed forces; and (ii) the PSNI; and to detail any such exemptions.
(AQW 20085/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill is an enabling Bill and the detail, including exemptions, will be in the Regulations. Regulations will be brought to the Social Development Committee for scrutiny in due course.

Northern Ireland
Assembly

Friday 1 March 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Community Relations Council

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the filling of vacant positions on the board of the Community Relations Council, following a request made in May 2012.
(AQO 3231/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Memorandum of Association of the Community Relations Council provides that we have the option of appointing up to one-third of the CRC Board Members.

We have not taken up this option, as the model for strategic direction for the delivery mechanisms for good relations is still under discussion. Options for delivery mechanisms were part of the CSI consultation and part of the ongoing discussions among parties on the best way forward for good relations delivery.

The Council has been advised that they can proceed with a recruitment competition for Board Members to fill available positions.

Racial Equality Strategy

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish the Race Equality Strategy.
(AQW 19521/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are fully committed to tackling racial inequalities and promoting good race relations.

The Racial Equality Strategy is key to achieving these twin aims and officials have been working with minority ethnic representatives through the Racial Equality Panel to draft a new strategy that will meet the needs and aspirations of minority ethnic people and wider society.

We want to make sure that the document is fit for purpose and partnership working with representatives of minority ethnic people on the drafting of the Strategy will continue to ensure we achieve this aim.

We envisage that a 12-week public consultation will begin in spring this year.

The Strategy will be launched after this process has been completed and the consultation responses have been considered.

Children's Consultative Group

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to list the membership of the Children's Consultative Group; (ii) how often the group meets; (iii) how often it met in the last twelve months; and (iv) what is the remit of the group.
(AQW 19684/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The need for a means to engage with stakeholders from the children and young people's sector has been identified within the programme structure for Delivering Social Change. In developing the Children and Young Person's Early Actions Paper two consultative events with key stakeholders were held. A Communication Plan for the Delivering Social Change Framework is in preparation. This will include proposals for engaging with stakeholders.

Civil Contingencies Legislation

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 19131/11-15, why there are no plans to introduce civil contingencies legislation.
(AQW 19714/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is not appropriate to have the UK civil contingencies legislation introduced because the wider legislative environment, structures, roles and responsibilities that apply within the public sector here are very different to those which apply in GB. To ensure that relevant needs are addressed here, our Department has set out a

statement of core civil contingencies principles in the 'Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework 2011' which apply to all public service organisations.

Planning: Appeals

Mr Easton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many planning appeals there have been over the last three years.
(AQW 20077/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its status, we have asked its Chief Commissioner to provide a response directly to you.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Development Fund

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of the concern within rural development groups in relation to the potential negative impact on programmes following her Department's decision to claw back the underspend from axis 3 of the Rural Development Fund.
(AQW 18632/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I have been aware of the concern within Clusters and my Officials have worked closely with the Cluster Networking Group to agree the finer detail of the mechanism to remove unspent axis 3 funds. The detail has now been agreed with the Cluster Networking Group and I'm sure that everyone will strive to ensure that their quarterly targets are met. Clusters have been aware of my concern at the level of spend within axis 3 and since the proposed introduction of this mechanism spend targets have started to be met on a much more consistent basis. I have always made it clear that I would take whatever actions had to be taken to ensure that all these funds were invested in rural areas.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the statement from the European Health Commissioner, that a TB cattle vaccine will not be available prior to 2023, will affect her departmental plans to tackle TB in the next 5 years.
(AQW 19328/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Currently the EU Commission legislation prohibits the vaccination of cattle against bovine TB, principally because vaccination of cattle can interfere with the single comparative intradermal tuberculin test (SCITT) which is the recognised primary diagnostic test for TB in cattle.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is working with the EU to seek to change the existing legislation which may allow TB vaccination of cattle alongside the use of a test to differentiate infected from vaccinated animals ("DIVA" test) to be used as an additional tool for TB control and may ultimately allow vaccinated cattle to enter trade. My officials will continue to liaise with DEFRA to remain updated on progress on this issue.

Before any change to the legislative position in relation to cattle vaccination would be considered, field trials would have to be approved by the EU Commission prior to being conducted and validated.

In addition, we should wish to be certain that any such vaccine developed would have international acceptance before considering its use here, given the value of our export dependent trade in livestock and livestock products which is worth over £1,000 million per year. We must ensure that our export trade is not compromised as a consequence and care will have to be taken to avoid trade embargoes on the export of livestock and livestock products. It is also desirable that we have an all-island approach on this.

The tentative timeline from the European Health Commissioner indicates the interim steps and milestones that will be needed to achieve the possible use of vaccine in cattle in the EU by 2023. However, this does not mean that we will be inactive in our efforts to tackle bovine TB here as is demonstrated in my Department's formal response to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee's Report into Bovine Tuberculosis.

Cattle: Crime Reference Number

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Newry Divisional Veterinary Office requests a crime reference number for cattle lost or stolen when other Divisional Veterinary Offices do not request this information.
(AQW 19515/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under The Cattle Identification (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 2012 which came into force on 1 January 2013, keepers must now report cattle which are lost or stolen, in writing to DARD, within 7 days of the event being noticed.

It is not a legal requirement that keepers report suspected stolen cattle to the PSNI and even when they do it is not a legal requirement that they tell the Department the crime reference number. Although provision of the information is not compulsory it is not unreasonable for a DARD official to request the additional information where the keeper has indicated they have reported the suspected theft to the PSNI.

Cattle: Live Export to Libya

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has discussed with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine the Republic of Ireland pursuing live cattle export business opportunities to Libya.
(AQW 19555/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have not discussed this matter with Minister Coveney.

Urban Foxes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the threat of urban foxes.
(AQW 19663/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department carries out surveillance on the fox population for the purpose of meeting the EU requirements for demonstrating the north's freedom from certain animal diseases, namely trichinella and echinococcus multilocularis (tapeworm). This surveillance has shown that neither of these infections is present in the fox population here.

The Department also implements border controls and quarantine measures to prevent the entry of rabies, which is not present in the north.

Fishing Vessels: Health and Safety

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will initiate (i) a co-ordinated approach with the Coastguard and Maritime Agency, the UK Border Agency and the Health and Safety Executive to enforce the health and safety regulations on fishing vessels, in particular the EU Working Time Seafarers Directive 1999 to prevent further losses at sea; and (ii) a registration system to ensure that all seafarers working locally can provide documents to prove they hold (a) the relevant immigration status; (b) the International Seaman Handbook; and (c) proof of the necessary skills to work at sea.
(AQW 19699/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the dangers faced by seafarers in their working environment locally, and the contribution of immigrants to the fishing industry in particular.

DARD and Maritime and Coastguard Agency have a coordinated approach in place and my Department has the ability to suspend a vessel's fishing licence where the Agency has detected serious health and safety concerns.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency take the lead in marine safety issues, and I am advised that Merchant Shipping Legislation is overarching, ensuring the application of appropriate Health and Safety regulations including the application of the Working Time Directive and the certification of immigrant workers.

Rural Communities: Emigration

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the extent and scale of emigration from rural communities, and to outline her Department's strategy for stemming the flow of people, including young people, away from rural areas.
(AQW 19701/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the last 10 years, the population of most towns and villages has been growing at a healthy rate due to a number of factors including natural population growth, migration from Greater Belfast to rural areas and a net inflow of people to the region. However, the most recent statistics available from NISRA on migration show that during 2010-11 there was a net outflow from the north of over 900 people aged between 20 and 29, with the greatest net outflow being from Belfast City Council area.

I am acutely aware of the difficulties facing people, including young people, looking for work in rural areas. My Department continues to provide support and assistance to the agri-food sector which provides much needed jobs in rural areas. The DARD Colleges (CAFRE) play a vital role in helping this sector remain competitive in a global market by delivering higher and further education programmes to those entering the industry and providing services and training for those already working in it.

I can assure you that my Department is working hard to promote other employment opportunities in rural areas by delivering a range of funding opportunities under the Rural Development Programme, as well as initiatives under the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework. This includes support for two rural youth initiatives, the Youth Employability scheme and the Youth Entrepreneurship programme which are aimed at increasing employability and promoting entrepreneurship among the young and unemployed in rural areas.

Rural Communities: Emigration

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure the forced youth emigration from rural communities is addressed by the Executive.
(AQW 19702/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The most recent statistics available from NISRA on migration show that during 2010-11 there was a net outflow from the North of over 900 young people aged between 20 and 29, with the greatest outflow being experienced by Belfast City Council area. This issue is therefore not confined to rural areas but faces communities right across the North. I can advise that through the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation framework, my department is supporting two rural youth initiatives aimed at increasing employability and promoting entrepreneurship among the young unemployed in rural areas.

Firstly the Youth Employability scheme (BOOST) which is co-funded by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) provides almost 1500 unemployed young people with an opportunity to develop skills to increase their employability and improve their chances of securing a job.

Secondly The Rural Youth Entrepreneurship (RYE) programme aims to develop business potential among vulnerable young people in rural areas. The Rural Development Council (RDC) is the lead delivery partner for RYE in the North and are engaging with 600 vulnerable rural young people to stimulate business creation.

The Department's College, CAFRE, also plays a vital role delivering higher and further education programmes to those entering the agri-food industry with almost 1700 students currently enrolled on further or higher education courses, many of those from rural areas. A high proportion of CAFRE students secure employment once they graduate with statistics showing that over 90% are either in employment or continuing in education six months after graduating.

I am confident that these innovative initiatives and the ongoing work of my Department will continue to help address the problem of youth unemployment in rural areas and in doing so will help reduce migration and increase the sustainability of rural communities.

Horse Meat in Food Products: Role of DARD Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what role the Central Investigation Service has had, or will have, in relation to the issue of horse meat entering the food chain.
(AQW 19744/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Central Investigation Service does not have a role in relation to the issue of horse meat entering the food chain. The Unit is responsible for investigating any cases of suggested fraud identified by business areas across DARD. As I have consistently stated, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the central competent authority in matters of food safety and authenticity in NI, Scotland and Wales.

Horses: Illegal Movement

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Central Investigation Service was alerted to any illegal horse movements from outside Northern Ireland in relation to the Lammas Fair, Ballycastle.
(AQW 19745/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Central Investigation Service has not been alerted to any illegal horse movements from outside the north of Ireland in relation to the Lammas Fair, Ballycastle.

Farm-reared Salmon

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the Escape Monitoring Programme at the River Bush Salmon Station has detected any escaped farm-reared salmon in the last ten years.
(AQW 19821/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I attach a table setting out the number of escaped farm salmon recorded at the River Bush Salmon Station in the last 10 years. You will note that numbers are very low.

The River Bush trap detects those escaped salmon that migrate into the River Bush. This monitoring provides for a relative measure of escapes and would quickly indicate if a significant escape event had occurred since numbers would increase significantly for a time. The origin of the fish could then be investigated.

Year	No. escapees	% escapees
2003	2	0.28
2004	3	0.34
2005	0	0
2006	1	0.09
2007	0	0

Year	No. escapees	% escapees
2008	0	0
2009	0	0
2010	0	0
2011	1	0.18
2012	0	0

Farmland Degradation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the (i) degradation of the productive capacity of farmland that has resulted from the adverse climatic conditions over the past 18 months; (ii) loss of soil nutrients; (iii) loss of biomass and vegetative cover; and (iv) loss of productivity.
(AQW 19834/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) degradation of the productive capacity of farmland

- My technical teams at CAFRE have advised me that no irreparable damage has been done to the land. As soon as weather conditions allow, significant land improvement/rejuvenation work can be undertaken.

(ii) loss of soil nutrients

- My technical teams also advise me that intense rainfall can cause significant losses of nutrients from soil. Research by AFBI has shown that, environmentally and agronomically, the most serious nutrient losses as a result of intense rainfall are those associated with the mobilisation of fertiliser and slurry nutrients.
- Furthermore wet conditions heighten gaseous denitrification losses of nitrate-N from applied fertiliser and manure. Agronomically, losses of nitrogen and potassium from applied fertiliser and manure are of economic importance, because they can significantly curtail grass and crop production via nitrogen and potassium deficiencies.
- Recent research, undertaken by AFBI in 2009 and 2011, two of the wettest years in recent times, has shown that sulphur deficiency curtailed grass production on more than 25% of silage and grazed swards at first cut or first grazing. From an arable crop perspective, wet conditions result in the leaching of, potassium (K), magnesium (Mg), boron (B) and sulphur (S) out of the crop rooting zone causing significant K and Mg deficiency problems in potatoes and other root crops, and B and S deficiency problems in cereal and vegetable crops.
- However, the problem of soil nutrient loss is largely self-correcting once drier conditions return, since soils in NI can generally restore or replenish plant available K, Mg, B and S supplies via the breakdown or mineralization of clay minerals and organic matter.

(iii) loss of biomass and vegetative cover

- Since 95% of the land area in the north of Ireland is grassland there is no concern regarding vegetative cover, as crops are still in place. Bearing this in mind crop cover will ensure the retention of biomass within the soil structure

(iv) loss of productivity.

- There will be a reduction in livestock performance due to increased incidence of disease e.g. liver fluke and reduced grass intake because of low dry matter, spoilage and poor grazing conditions. To improve land or maintain animal performance will result in increased costs to the farmer and will impact on cash flow.
- From an arable cropping perspective some autumn sown crops will have lower yields this year. However the high cost of seed and cultivations and the lower yields of spring cereals may mean that the best economic option will be to allow winter sown crops to remain in the rotation through to harvest. On some land where potatoes or other root crops have been harvested in very wet conditions, land drainage may have to be carried out to restore productive capability.
- While the productivity of land will be affected in the short term, there are opportunities for farmers to take remedial action regarding soil damage.
- CAFRE are planning to publish a series of press articles on assessing potential soil damage including possible remedial actions.
- These press articles will be followed up by on-farm events to which farmers will be invited.

Agricultural Land: Waterlogging

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the temporary and permanent damage caused to agricultural land by waterlogging, in the last 18 months.
(AQW 19836/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My technical teams at CAFRE have indicated that no permanent or irreversible damage to agricultural land has been caused by the waterlogging and heavy rainfall over the last 18 months.

- Any damage caused to soils through poaching with animals or use of heavy machinery can be repaired once weather and land conditions improve.
- Damage will vary greatly from farm to farm depending on soil type, local rainfall levels and stocking rates.
- CAFRE are planning to publish a series of press articles on assessing potential soil damage including possible remedial actions.
- These press articles will be followed up by on-farm events to which farmers will be invited.
- The temporary affect of waterlogging is evident through reduced land and animal productivity and nutrient losses, this has been addressed within AQW 19834/11-15

Memoranda of Dissent

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many memoranda of dissent have been recorded within her Department since May 2011.
(AQW 19865/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that no memoranda of dissent have been recorded within my Department since May 2011.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in order to help identify and control future Ash Dieback disease, what consideration she has given to adopting a pre-arrival notification approach at ports and airports as has been enforced in the rest of the UK.
(AQW 19872/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am currently considering further legislation, in conjunction with the South, to introduce a requirement for pre-notification of certain species of trees from within the EU. Pre-notification could assist in preventing disease outbreaks and importantly, provide intelligence about plant movements and assist in tracing problems. It is important our bio-security is strengthened to reduce the risk of entry of pests and disease to our island.

Land Parcel Identification System: Software Error

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to a recent software error in the Land Parcel Identification System mapping system, to detail (i) the estimated cost of repairing the error in terms of (a) resources; and (b) staff time; and (ii) an indicative timescale for the repairs.
(AQW 19970/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that the estimated cost of repairing the error in terms of resource is £2,250 and staff time is £3,951.

The software error was resolved by 22nd February 2013.

Slaughterhouses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the action her Department is taking to ensure that no illegal slaughterhouses and/or rendering plants are currently operating.
(AQW 19977/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Veterinary Service's Central Enforcement Team assists local District Councils and FSA in their investigations of any reports of illegal slaughter they receive.

Reports of illegal disposal of Animal By-Products (ABP) are also followed up and investigated by DARD inspectors. None of these investigations have suggested the presence of an illegal rendering plant.

Land Parcel Identification System: Software Error

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to a recent software error in the Land Parcel Identification System, (i) how many maps have been affected; (ii) when affected farmers were contacted by her Department to make them aware of the errors; and (iii) when revised maps will be issued to all affected claimants.
(AQW 20032/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) There were 3,560 farm business affected by the software error which occurred with the last set of maps to issue on 6th February 2013.

(ii) The Department met with officials from the Ulster Farmers Union, the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association and the Northern Ireland Agricultural Consultants Association to explain the situation and issued a Press

Release on 21 February. A letter issued to farmers on 25 February explaining how the Department has dealt with the problem.

(iii) The affected farm businesses have access to revised maps on line since 22 February and will receive revised maps around the time they receive their 2013 Single Application Forms.

Land Mapping

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the additional costs, in terms of factors such as overtime, for dealing with problems identified in the field mapping exercise.
(AQW 20043/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that the estimated cost of repairing the recent problem with farm business maps in terms of resource is £2,250 and staff time is £3,951, making a total of £6,201.

Overtime has been in operation in DARD Direct offices to facilitate demand from farmers wishing to ensure their maps are as accurate as possible, but this is not specific to the recent problem identified with a minority of maps.

Slaughterhouses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) how many slaughterhouses and/or rendering plants are licensed to slaughter and/or process equestrian animals; and (ii) whether they are compliant with animal welfare regulations and supervised by departmental staff including vets.
(AQW 20059/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no slaughter plants here currently approved to slaughter horses.

There was 1 slaughter plant in Co Armagh approved for equine slaughter and slaughter of other species but it ceased slaughtering horses completely on 25th January 2013.

All slaughter premises here (including the former equine slaughter facility) are staffed by DARD veterinarians who are present at all times when slaughter is occurring, to ensure the Food Business Operators' compliance with public health, animal health and animal welfare legislation.

Each animal (including equines, when their slaughter was taking place) is individually examined in the lairage for fitness for the food chain before being allowed to be slaughtered. This inspection also verifies their identity, and ensures that their welfare is protected throughout the process.

There are 2 rendering plants approved here to process fallen animals, which may include fallen horse carcasses and parts of carcasses.

Both rendering plants are inspected on a monthly basis by Department staff to ensure that they are complying with the regulations.

Any non-conformances detected have been of a minor nature and have been satisfactorily dealt with during the inspection process.

DARD: Legal Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many legal claims have been taken against her Department in the last three years.
(AQW 20080/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below details the number of legal claims taken against my Department and its Agencies since 2009/10.

Year	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 to date
Claims	22	22	26	21

A legal claim is considered to have been made where my Department has had to involve the Departmental Solicitors Office to provide it with either advice or counsel.

Horse Meat in Food Products: Liaison Between Departments and External Agencies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to improve governance between Departments and external agencies in the wake of the horse meat scandal.
(AQW 20088/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is the competent authority in matters of food safety and authenticity here.

DARD Veterinary Service delivers meat hygiene official controls on behalf of the FSA in approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments, and its Agri-food Inspection Branch carries out primary production hygiene inspections on dairy and egg-laying premises. These activities are governed by Service Level Agreements with the FSA

in the north of Ireland (FSA in NI). Senior officials from DARD and FSA in the north of Ireland maintain regular formal and informal contact to ensure consistent and effective delivery to the agreed standard, and the FSA performs regular checks and independent audits in to ensure the quality of work delivered on its behalf.

There is regular liaison between FSA in the north of Ireland, DARD and District Councils relating to dual enforcement issues in meat establishments. This includes the sharing of audit findings, joint approval visits and regular meetings of an approval forum.

The FSA performs regular checks and independent audits here, to ensure the quality of the work delivered on its behalf.

In response to the recent findings, and current concerns, the FSA has developed a 4 point action plan which is being implemented in conjunction with the food industry and other government departments (including DARD).

The response between NICS Departments has been co-ordinated through the Food and Feed Incident Management Group, chaired by the Chief Veterinary Officer. This group has, to date, met four times on 17 January and 1, 8 and 21 February.

Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons for the transfer of funding from Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification funds to other measures as detailed in a letter to the Chairs of Joint Council Committees on 31 January 2013.
(AQW 20097/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The letter to Chairs of Joint Council Committees (JCC's) was to facilitate a number of requests received from JCC's to transfer funds from Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification to other Measures in Axis 3.

Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the reasons given by groups for why funds in Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification not being been committed.
(AQW 20100/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The window for requests has not closed but to date Clusters have cited several reasons for wanting to move measure 3.1 funds as follows:-

- Inability to get enough applications to fully commit 3.1
- Wanting to ensure all funds were used in the Cluster area
- To guarantee spend

Farm Diversification Funds

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the number of requests received by her Department asking it to consider the reallocation of uncommitted Farm Diversification funds to other measures; and who made the requests.
(AQW 20101/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The window for requests has not closed but to date my Department has received 3 requests from Lagan Rural Partnership (LRP), Generating Rural Opportunities Within South Antrim (GROW) and Southern Organisation for Action in Rural areas (SOAR).

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure where the opening ceremony of the World Police and Fire Games 2013 will take place.
(AQW 19447/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Opening Ceremony of the World Police and Fire Games will take place at the Kings Hall, Belfast.

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what urgent action her Department is taking to secure a venue for the World Police and Fire Games 2013 Opening Ceremony.
(AQW 19486/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 15 venues were scored against a comprehensive set of criteria to identify the most suitable venue to host the Opening Ceremony.

This process identified a preferred option and contingency options for consideration by the World Police and Fire Games Board.

The Board considered these options at its meeting on 20 February 2013 and the venue selected for the Opening Ceremony is the Kings Hall, Belfast.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for which locations contracts have been signed for the World Police and Fire Games.
(AQW 19560/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To date, one sporting venue contract has been signed (Hydebank) and negotiations on the finalisation of contacts for all sporting venues are at an advanced stage.

All of the sporting venues for the Games have been confirmed with venue organisers and were announced on 31 May 2012.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for which sporting events in the World Police and Fire Games venues have not yet been finalised.
(AQW 19561/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All venues for the delivery of sporting events in the 2013 World Police and Fire Games have been confirmed.

To date, one sporting venue contract has been signed (Hydebank) and negotiations on the finalisation of contacts for all venues are at an advanced stage.

Full details of venue locations are provided on the 2013 World Police and Fire Games website (www.2013wpfg.com).

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what locations are being considered for the World Police and Fire Games opening ceremony.
(AQW 19562/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The venue for the Opening Ceremony of the World Police and Fire Games will be held at the Kings Hall, Belfast.

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when an announcement will be made on the location of the World Police and Fire Games opening ceremony.
(AQW 19563/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The announcement that the venue selected for the Opening Ceremony is the Kings Hall, Belfast, was made on 20 February 2013.

World Police and Fire Games: Opening Ceremony

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why it has been left so late to find a venue for the opening of the World Police and Fire Games; and where responsibility lies for the delay.
(AQW 19567/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited and Belfast City Council considered sites across the city and undertook a costs analysis in seeking a suitable venue for the Opening Ceremony of the 2013 World Police and Fire Games.

The announcement that the venue selected for the Opening Ceremony is the Kings Hall, Belfast, was made on 20 February 2013. This provides sufficient time to plan and deliver the Ceremony.

Sport: Cross-community Engagement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what grants are available to encourage cross-community engagement in sport.
(AQW 19741/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, which is an arms length body of DCAL, has primary responsibility for the distribution of grants to sport. As part of its grant aiding conditions, Sport NI operates an equality scheme which requires and encourages all recipients of funding to run facilities and services in an inclusive manner and to promote equality and cross community engagement.

In addition, I am aware of a number of other organisations which may provide grant support for cross community engagement in sport. These include:

- Big Lottery Fund – Awards for All, Culture for All;
- Community Relations Council – Engage in community relations work and to enhance the community relations potential of projects; and
- Belfast City Council – Summer Intervention Fund, Summer Playscheme Grant, Community Project Grant.

Boxing Clubs: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 18728/11-15, whether she will supply the information for the entire constituency as outlined in the original question.
(AQW 19788/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer provided to question AQW 19728/11-15 contains the information requested for the entire constituency.

Boxing

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she plans to support the establishment of a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association, given that the Assembly members supported this on 12 November 2012.
(AQW 19789/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The establishment of an amateur boxing association restricted to the north of Ireland is entirely a matter for the sport to consider.

I have, however, already made clear my view that I see no rationale for any proposal to divide boxing given its strong track record of inclusiveness. The current structures governing boxing across Ireland have delivered consistently good social and sporting outcomes at local, national and international level.

Sport: Racism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the initiatives that are being used to combat racism in sport.
(AQW 19819/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already stated publicly my own commitment to the promotion of equality and anti-discrimination generally as well as to the implementation within sport of the requirements of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 which specifically places an obligation on public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity across a range of groups including people from different racial backgrounds. My Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, also commits Government to promote community cohesion, including combating racism, through sport in the context of 'A Shared Future'.

In line with these commitments, Sport NI, an arms length body of DCAL, recently produced 'Promoting Fair Play in Sport'- a guide to sport and the equality legislation in the north of Ireland and has a dedicated equality section on its website which provides up-to-date equality information for all sports organisations. Sport NI is also working with all funded governing bodies to support them in achieving the foundation level of the Equality Standard: A Framework for Sport.

Furthermore, as part of its wider safe sports grounds initiative, DCAL supported the Department of Justice in introducing the Justice Act (NI) 2011 which makes it a criminal offence for spectators at regulated matches to engage in racist chanting or to stir up hatred against groups of persons on the basis of race.

Windsor Park

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans her Department has to promote the revamped Windsor Park as a potential venue for the UEFA Super Cup Final.
(AQW 19867/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for promoting Windsor Park as a potential venue for the UEFA Super Cup Final rests, in the first instance, with the governing body of football in the north of Ireland, the Irish Football Association.

Sport: Junior Sports Teams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what grants are available for setting up junior sports teams.
(AQW 19886/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, which is an arm's length body of DCAL, has primary responsibility for the distribution of grants to sport. However, Sport NI does not currently have any funding programmes open which are specifically aimed at setting up junior sports teams.

Grants for this purpose would have been available in the past under the Sport NI 'Awards for Sport' Programme and 'Sport Matters-Capital and Equipment' Programme. Consideration may be given to re-open the 'Awards for Sport' Programme in

future financial years. In the meantime, I understand that there are other funders who may consider grant support for setting up junior sports teams and a list can be obtained from Sport NI's website www.sportni.net/funding.

Inshore Sea Angling

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department will assume responsibility for the regulation and development of inshore sea angling.
(AQW 19930/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL's remit under the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 is the conservation, protection and development of salmon and inland fisheries. The mouths of rivers are defined in the Act, which establishes the boundary between the sea and inland fisheries.

DCAL's responsibility does not extend to inshore sea angling.

DCAL: Economic, Social and Equality Returns

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's approach to the development of a model for sustainable economic, social, and equality returns across all departmental work streams.
(AQO 3458/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Programme for Government clearly states the Executive's primary focus and collective responsibility to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

I have therefore set tackling poverty and social exclusion as the key priority for my Department. This fully supports DCAL's mission to deliver economic growth and to enhance the quality of life here by unlocking the full potential of the culture, arts and leisure sectors.

This priority is guiding all departmental work streams and will bring concerted effort in proactively tackling patterns of social disadvantage that have existed historically and remain today.

For example, my Department is currently compiling its strategy to ensure delivery against the PfG target to "include Social Clauses in all public procurement contracts for suppliers, services and construction" and to maximise the socio-economic impacts achievable.

Many in our community face profound and persistent barriers to equality of opportunity. These are exacerbated by poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. Therefore it is imperative that everything we do across Government helps to deliver sustainable economic, social, and equality returns.

Question for Written Answer: AQW 18202/11-15

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she intends to answer AQW 18202/11-15.
(AQO 3462/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The answer to AQW 18202/11-15 issued on the 22nd of February 2013.

First World War: Centenary

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to acknowledge and commemorate, during the centenary of the First World War in 2014, the service of men and women from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
(AQO 3466/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The First World War is one of several major events and significant anniversaries from the 1912 - 1922 period. The creative and cultural infrastructure and programmes already funded and supported by my Department will play a key role in telling the stories and different interpretations of the First World War and other important events from this Decade of Centenaries.

For example, Libraries NI is developing a programme of exhibitions, talks and book launches to commemorate the start of the First World War.

National Museums NI is planning online access to collections and an exhibition and programming at the Ulster Museum and Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. This will also involve co-operation with the National Museum of Ireland, and the Imperial War Museum and National Portrait Gallery in London.

PRONI is also planning an exhibition and a lecture series as well as collaboration with other archives and museums in Ireland and Britain.

The Somme Heritage Centre is developing a programme of work exploring significant anniversaries during the Decade of Centenaries and this will include a focus on the First World War.

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to provide additional funding for the upgrade of exhibits at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum at Cultra.
(AQO 3470/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is a matter for the Board of Trustees to prioritise their budgets, including allocations to renew or upgrade exhibits and exhibitions.

I have no plans to allocate additional funds at present as my Department has provided a £2.2m capital budget to National Museums this year.

The Trustees are spending £450,000 of this budget, plus a further £257k of NITB match funding, at the Folk and Transport Museum site.

This will develop the Folk Museum as a leader in fostering rural crafts, skills and traditions and as a "must-see" cultural and heritage destination.

Department of Education

DE: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations on interest, pursuant to the obligation of civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19246/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Like all civil servants Special Advisers are contractually required under the Standards of Conduct Section 6.01 of the NICS HR Handbook to declare any conflicts of interest so that decisions can be made on the best way to proceed. There is no published register of such declarations.

Education: Regional Training Unit

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for the removal of funding from the Regional Training Unit, in relation to the Professional Qualification for Headship (NI) award.
(AQW 19559/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Budget 2011-15 outcome for education produced major challenges and a Savings Delivery Plan was developed to ensure that my Department remained within budget.

The saving target for Professional Support Services includes a number of funding areas including the Regional Training Unit (RTU). The budget in respect of the RTU for 2011/12 was £2,363k, and was reduced to £1,032k in 2012/13. There has been a considerable degree of transparency and notice over the savings required for this financial year.

The RTU is not, however, specifically funded for the operation of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH). It is a matter for the RTU Management Board to determine which programmes to run, in line with my priorities.

Education: Nurture Group Provision

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16033/11-15, for an update on the current situation.
(AQW 19597/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Proposals to identify potential locations for new nurture group provision based on objective criteria are under active consideration within DE and DSD.

Education: Continuing Professional Development

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19225/11-15, how the £11.5 million has been allocated in this financial year.
(AQW 19841/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The budget in respect of Continuing Professional Development across the school sectors in this financial year is as follows:

	£000
Teacher Education (Irish Medium Review)	82
Early Professional Development	234
STEM (Science Technology Engineering Maths)	300

	£000
RTU (Regional Training Unit)	1,032
Teacher e-Portfolio	40
CASS (Curriculum Advisory and Support Service)	9,840 *

* Forecast spend.

Teaching and Non-teaching Posts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) teaching posts; and (ii) non teaching posts which have been made redundant in each of the last three years, broken down by Education and Library Board.
(AQW 19853/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The tables below detail the number of teaching and non-teaching posts made redundant in each of the last three financial years.

(i) Teaching Staff

	Financial Years		
	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013 (to date)
BELB	33	40	65
WELB	19	31	103
NEELB	47	76	103
SEELB	25	50	119
SELB	31	47	110
VGS	23	84	138
GMI	8	9	28
Total	**186**	**337**	**666**

(ii) Non-teaching staff (Headquarters)

	Financial Years		
	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013 (to date)
BELB	18	20	8
WELB	26	58	20
NEELB	23	31	19
SEELB	21	20	15
SELB	7	55	2
CCMS	9	9	0
Total	**104**	**193**	**64**

(iii) Non-teaching staff (School-based)

	Financial Years		
	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013 (to date)
BELB	18	24	36
WELB	32	31	71
NEELB	53	75	83
SEELB	39	79	141
SELB	56	63	107
VGS	21	149	110

	Financial Years		
	2010/2011	**2011/2012**	**2012/2013 (to date)**
GMI	9	32	35
Total	**228**	**453**	**583**

Note:

1. VGS: Voluntary Grammar Schools
2. GMI: Grant Maintained Integrated Schools
3 Figures provided by each Education and Library Board in tables (i) and (iii) include staff in Controlled and Maintained Schools.

Schools: Development Proposals

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education which schools submitted development proposals to his Department in (i) 2011; (ii) 2012; and (iii) 2013 to date; and what are the outcomes of these proposals.
(AQW 19961/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A list of the development proposals published in the three years requested and a note of their outcomes is provided in the tables below.

(i) Development Proposals published in 2011

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/ date of decision
215	Elmbrook School 231-6601 & Erne School 231-6234	To amalgamate to form a new Controlled Special School on the Derrygonnelly Road, with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	05/01/11	Approved 25/05/11
254	Gaelscoil Aodha Rua 504-6695	To establish a new grant-aided, irish-medium Primary School in Dungannon, from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	17/02/11	Approved 15/06/11
257	Randalstown PS 301-0816	To convert the existing Reception Class to a Nursery Unit with 26 part-time places with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	24/02/11	Not Approved 26/05/11
204	Currie PS 101-0063	To establish a nursery unit with 26 full-time places with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	03/03/11	Not Approved 26/05/11
258	Gaelscoil Eanna 304-6685	Establishment of a 26 Place Full Time Nursery Unit, with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/03/11	Not Approved 29/08/11
221	Connor House Prep Dept of Bangor GS 462-0015	Closure of Preparatory Dept with effect from 31 August 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter	22/03/11	Approved 08/07/11
220	Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche 404-6648	Establishment of a 26 Place Full Time Nursery Unit, with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	22/03/11	Not Approved 29/08/11
216	Jones Memorial PS 201-6003	Establishment of Autistic Spectrum Disorder Class for Key Stage 1 followed by the Development of a Learning Support Class for Key Stage 2	06/04/11	Approved 15/08/11
206	Vere Foster PS 101-0321	To seek the approval of the Department of Education to cease educational provision with effect from 31 August 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	07/04/11	Approved 20/06/11

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/ date of decision
259	Braid PS 303-0836	To close on 31 August 2011, or as soon as possible thereafter.	12/04/11	Approved 14/07/11
260	Lourdes PS 303-6093	To close on 31 August 2011, or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/04/11	Approved 14/07/11
263	Gaelscoil Ui Neill 504-6637	To extend the capacity from a 5 to a 7 class base school from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 28/07/11
257	Orchard County PS 501-6658	That a new nursery unit be providing 26 full-time places from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 21/12/11
255	Bocombra PS 501-6138	For a new nursery unit to be established providing 26 full-time places from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter	21/04/11	Approved 07/06/12
256	Drumadonnell PS 501-6616	That a new nursery unit be established providing 26 full-time places from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 15/02/12
258	Waringstown PS 501-1598	That a new nursery unit be established providing 26 full-time places, from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 30/01/12
259	Seagoe PS 504-6137	That an additional nursery unit be established from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 07/06/12
260	St Mary's PS 503-6043	That an additional nursery unit be established from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Not Approved 30/01/12
261	St Patrick's PS 503-1697	That the existing Reception Class be converted to a 26 full-time place Nursery Unit with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 15/02/12
262	Portadown Integrated PS 506-6553	That an additional nursery unit be established from 1 September 2011, or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/04/11	Approved 07/06/12
218	Portora Royal School 242-0042	Establish Co-Educational Post 16 provision with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	04/05/11	Approved 11/10/11
217	St Mary's Boys' PS 203-2689 & St Mary's Girl's PS 203-6096	Amalgamate to form a new co-educational Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible therafter.	05/05/11	Approved 11/10/11
264	St Francis of Assisi PS 503-6610	That a nursery unit be established to accommodate 26 permanent full-time children with effect from 1 September 2011, or as soon as possible thereafter.	26/05/11	Not Approved 28/10/11
205	Gaelscoil na Mona 104-6671	To establish a new grant-aided, Irish-medium nursery unit with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	02/06/11	Not Approved 17/01/12
209	St Vincent's Centre 123-0275	The existing behavioural unit will close with effect from 31 August 2011 and an 11-16 maintained special school be opened on the current St Vincent's site from 1 September 2011, or as soon as possible thereafter.	07/07/11	Not Approved 07/12/11

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/ date of decision
201	Brefne NS 111-0028	To increase full-time provision from 26 full-time places to 36 full-time places with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	07/07/11	Not Approved 30/01/12
207	Cranmore Integrated PS 106-6580	To establish a nursery unit with 26 full-time places within Cranmore Integrated Primary School with effect from 1 September 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.	07/07/11	Not Approved 07/02/12
230	Aghavilly PS 501-1034	To close on 31 August 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	05/09/11	Approved 03/01/12
266	Keady PS 501-6028	To close on 31 August 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	05/09/11	Approved 03/01/12
265	Edenderry NS 511-0021	That a third full-time unit be established with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	05/09/11	Approved 07/06/12
267	Gaelscoil Eoghain 504-6699	To establish a new grant-aided, Irish-medium primary school in Cookstown, from the 1st September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/11/11	Approved 02/05/12
268	Gaelscoil na mBeann 504-6692	To establish a new grant-aided, Irish-medium primary school in Kilkeel, from the 1st September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/11/11	Approved 13/06/12
222	Tonagh PS 401-0885	Convert Reception Class to 26 full-time place Nursery Unit with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	28/11/11	Approved 02/04/12
223	Glenola Collegiate Prep Cygnet House 441-0097	Change to Co-Educational Status with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	28/11/11	Approved 02/04/12
224	Ballykeigle PS 401-1647	To close with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/12/11	Approved 20/03/12
225	Dunmurry HS 421-0194	To close with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/12/11	Approved 25/04/12
269	Primate Dixon PS 503-6590	That an additional nursery unit be established to increase the enrolment to 52 full-time places, from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/12/11	19/06/12
226	Redburn PS 401-1688	To close with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	20/12/11	Approved 27/03/12
210	St Aidan's CB PS 103-0316 & St Bernadette's PS 103-0317	To amalgamate to form a new co-educational primary school initially on the site of the existing St Aidan's Christian Brothers' Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	22/12/11	Approved 30/04/12
211	Edmund Rice PS 103-0329 & Star of the Sea Girls' PS 103-6464	To amalgamate to form a new co-educational primary school with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter. The new school will use the sites of the two existing schools in the first instance.	22/12/11	Approved 30/04/12

(ii) Development Proposals published in 2012

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/date of decision
220	Gaelscoil Neachtain 201-6700	Establish a new grant-aided, Controlled Irish medium Primary School in Dungiven, from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter	11/01/12	Approved 25/05/12
272	Bronte PS 501-6612	Establish a Nursery Unit to provide 26 full time places with effect from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	16/02/12	Approved 15/05/12
273	Iveagh PS 501-1611	Establish a Nursery Unit to provide 26 full time places with effect from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	16/02/12	Not Approved 15/05/12
274	Brackenagh West PS 501-6098	To extend the capacity from 6 to 7 class base primary school from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	16/02/12	Not approved 22/05/12
212	Colaiste Feirste 124-0291	To establish, a post primary satellite of Colaiste Feirste in Maghera	28/02/12	Decision Pending
222	Altnagelvin Hospital School 231-0029	Proposed closure of Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service	06/03/12	Approved 03/07/12
221	St Canice's PS 203-6045	Proposed closure of the Irish Medium Stream from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter	07/03/12	Approved 25/05/12
223	Knockavoe School 231-6528 Sion Mills PS 201-6442	Proposed relocation of the Speech & Language Support Classes from Knockavoe School Resource Centre to Sion Mills PS	08/03/12	Approved 03/07/12
225	Ardstraw PS 201-6376 Drumlegagh PS 201-2392	Proposal that Ardstraw and Drumlegagh amalgamate on the site of the existing Ardstraw Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	09/04/12	Approved 26/06/12
261	Dalriada School Prep Dept 362-0012	Phased closure commencing with effect from 31/08/12 followed by full closure with effect from 31/08/14 or as soon as possible thereafter	15/05/12	Approved 16/08/12
262	Carlane PS 303-0713	Proposed closure of Carlane PS with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/05/12	Approved 27/07/12
226	Drumragh College 226-0283	Proposal to increase the Enrolment of Drumragh College from 580 to 750 pupils over a period of 5 years.	15/05/12	Not Approved 12/10/12
227	Gaelscoil na Daroige 204-6687	Establish a new Irish Medium Nursery Unit on the site of Gaelscoil na Daróige from 1 September 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/05/12	Not Approved 15/08/12
228	St Eugene's HS 223-0111	Phased closure with effect from 31/08/12. Full closure of the school with effect from 31/08/13 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/05/12	Approved 16/08/12
229	St Peter's HS 223-0181	Phased closure with effect from 31/08/12. Full closure of the school with effect from 31/08/13, or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/05/12	Approved 08/08/12
230	St Davog's PS 203-2664	Proposed closure from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter	04/06/12	Approved 21/08/12
275	Dungannon NS 511-6236	Establish a third full-time unit be with effect from 1 September 2012, or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/06/12	Not Approved 06/12/12
263	Garvagh HS 321-0013	Proposed closure with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	27/06/12	Approved 27/09/12

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/date of decision
230	St Malachy's PS 403-6454	Proposal that the 3 Moderate Learning Difficulty Units should be changed to Learning Support Units. The modified Units will accommodate 30 P1 to P7 pupils and will be operational from 31 August 2013. (Units from Knockmore PS)	03/09/12	Approved 14/12/12
231	Carryduff PS 401-3044	Proposal that a Learning Support Unit is created. Unit will accommodate 6 to 8 P1 to P7 pupils and will be operational from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter. (Unit From Knockmore PS)	03/09/12	Approved 13/12/12
213	St Gemma's HS 123-0173	Proposal closure with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/09/12	Approved 07/01/13
276	Orchard County PS 501-6658	To extend the capacity from a 5 to a 6 class base from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/09/12	Decision Pending
277	Fair Hill PS 501-6599	To extend the capacity of Fair Hill Primary School from a 10 to an 11 class base from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	14/09/12	Decision Pending
231	Ballycolman NS 211-6333	Proposed closure from 31 December 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter. Predicated upon prior Ministerial approval being given to DP232	11/10/12	Decision Pending
232	St Mary's PS 203-6696	Proposal that St Mary's PS establish an additional double nursery unit (52 full time places) using the existing site of Ballycolman NS from 1 Jan 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter	11/10/12	Decision Pending
278	New-Bridge Integrated College 526-0285	To increase the admission number from 80 to 100 and sixth form from 100 to 120 pupils from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/10/12	Decision Pending
279	Donacloney PS 501-6178	To extend the capacity l from an 8 to a 9 class base from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/10/12	Decision Pending
232	Ballymagee PS 401-6430	Establish a 26 place part time nursery unit with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/11/12	Approved 17/01/13
214	Ballygolan PS 101-0296	To cease education provision with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/11/12	Decision Pending
264	Gaelscoil Éanna 304-6685	To increase approved total enrolment numbers of 140 to 176 - 205 from September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	13/12/12	Decision Pending

(iii) Development Proposals published in 2013

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/date of decision
233	Belmount House School 231-0015	Relocation of speech and language provision in the North West area. The Woodlands Unit, located at Belmont House School to close with effect from 31 August 2013, or as soon as possible therafter. This proposal is predicated upon prior Ministerial approval being given DPs 234, 235 and 236.	21/01/13	Decision Pending

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/date of decision
234	Ebrington PS 201-0382	The relocation of two speech and language classes from Woodlands Unit to Ebrington Primary School with effect from 1 September 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/01/13	Decision Pending
235	St Anne's PS, Derry 203-6069	The relocation of two speech and language classes from Woodlands Unit to St Anne's Primary School, Derry with effect from 1 September 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter	21/01/13	Decision Pending
236	Ballykelly PS 201-2298	Speech and Language Provision in the North West Area be expanded by two additional classes being established in Ballykelly PS from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	21/01/13	Decision Pending
237	St Eugene's PS 203-1888	To close with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter	21/01/13	Decision Pending
280	Fivemiletown PS 501-6088	To extend the approved enrolment from a 6 class base primary school to a 7 class base primary school with effect from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter	22/01/13	Decision Pending
238	St Dympna's PS 203-6186	Increase capacity from 145 to 210, with increase in admissions number from 21 to 30 pupils with effect from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	04/02/13	Decision Pending
233	Christ the Redeemer PS 403-6618	Increase capacity number from 570 to 700. This would permit the school to increase the admissions number from 87 pupils to 100 pupils with effect from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	12/02/13	Decision Pending
234	St Ita's PS 403-6642	Increases capacity number from 525 to 574. This would permit the school to increase the admissions number from 75 to 82 pupils with effect from 1 September 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter.	12/02/13	Decision Pending
215	Orangefield HS 121-0266	To close from September 2013, or as soon as possible thereafter.	12/02/13	Decision Pending
216	Ashfield Boys' HS 121-0015	Increase admissions number to 130 and the enrolment number to 820: rising to 850 by 2018.	12/02/13	Decision Pending
217	Ashfield Girls' HS 121-0014	Increase admissions number to 140 and the enrolment number to 840: rising to 900 by 2018.	12/02/13	Decision Pending
285	St Mary's PS 503-6087	Increase capacity from 230 - 315 from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	18/02/13	Decision Pending
286	St Colman's PS 503-6061	Increase capacity from 134 - 140 from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	18/02/13	Decision Pending
284	St Jarlath's PS 503-6121	Increase capacity from 158 - 210 from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	18/02/13	Decision Pending
283	Roan St Patrick's PS 503-2591	Increase capacity from 83 - 140 from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	18/02/13	Decision Pending
282	St Patrick's PS 503-1697	Increase capacity from 284 - 350 from 1 September 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter.	18/02/13	Decision Pending

DP no.	School/ref. no.	Description of proposal	Date published	Decision/date of decision
239	Bridgehill PS 303-6103	To close with effect from 31 August 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter	21/02/13	Decision Pending

Autism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school children living in the North Down Borough Council area have a statement of special educational needs for autism.
(AQW 20117/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below.

Pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs who have been recorded as having Autism and who are resident in the North Down Borough Council area – 2012/13

School type	Total pupils
Funded pre-school education	6
Primary school age	44
Post-primary school age	47
Total	**97**

Source: School census

Note:

1 Figures include children in voluntary and private pre-school centres, nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools.

2 Figures for pre-school children are based on school location, as only aggregate data is held by the Department for children attending voluntary and private pre-school centres.

Autism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school children in North Down, who have been diagnosed with autism, are awaiting a statement of special educational needs; and how many children with autism have been refused a statement in the last twelve months.
(AQW 20118/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that there are currently 40 children, living within the North Down Constituency, who have been diagnosed with autism as their primary special educational need (SEN) as follows:-

Pre-school	0
Primary	25
Post-primary	15

There are 3 children with autism, who are currently having their statutory assessment undertaken, but who have not yet received a final statement of SEN.

No children with autism have been refused a statement of SEN in the period February 2012 – January 2013.

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's expenditure on Community Relations Equality and Diversity for (i) 2011/12; and (ii) 2012/13; and how these funds are allocated.
(AQW 20119/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that my Department allocated £1,139k in 2011/12 and £1,163k in 2012/13 to fund implementation of the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy. The funds are allocated by applying the Assessment of Relative Needs Exercise (ARNE) formula, which takes into account a number of factors including population statistics for age 14-25, youth TSN data, level of rurality, etc. Funding has been allocated as follows:

	2011/12	2012/13
Belfast Education & Library Board	£221k	£222k

	2011/12	2012/13
North-Eastern Education & Library Board	£206k	£210k
South-Eastern Education & Library Board	£190k	£195k
Southern Education & Library Board	£223k	£218k
Western Education & Library Board	£161k	£175k
Youth Council NI	£138k	£143k

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity Policy

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what external evaluation has been, or will be, carried out to monitor the effectiveness of the Community Relations Equality and Diversity policy.
(AQW 20120/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you will be aware, the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy was launched in March 2011.

A formal evaluation will be commissioned from the Education and Training Inspectorate once the policy has had sufficient time to embed, likely to be 3-5 years, and any formal review is unlikely to take place before the 2014-15 academic year.

Officials are currently undertaking a series of informal CRED Focus Groups across the north of Ireland involving school principals, teachers, youth workers and young people to inform effective implementation of the policy.

Post-primary Education

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education when he will progress his Department's plans for post-primary education.
(AQW 20121/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following my statement to the Assembly on 26 February 2013, the revised area plans for post-primary provision, together with reports on the consultation responses, were released by the Education and Library Boards and made available on each Board's website. I have written to each Board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) outlining my Department's views on their plans and setting out how I plan to move forward. In the coming weeks my officials will meet with the Boards and CCMS to discuss in detail the Department's assessment of the plans and to identify areas where further work is needed.

A Steering Group will be established to assist the Department to co-ordinate and oversee the continuing development of the area plans. My Department will chair this group and it will include representatives from the Controlled, Maintained, Integrated and Irish-medium sectors. The group's work programme will aim to fill the gaps in the current area plans, to embed a single approach to area planning and to identify priority areas for action in the short to medium term.

Ministerial Advisory Group on the Advancement of Shared Education

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to outline the process that will follow the submission of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education's report.
(AQW 20122/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Ministerial Advisory Group report will inform policy to determine the most effective way to advance the Programme for Government commitments on Shared Education.

Planning the next stage in the process will be largely dependent on the specific findings of the independent report, but at this stage it would be my intention to embark on a civic debate to further inform the policy direction.

Teachers: Principles and Vice-principals Redundancy Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the establishment of an Efficient Discharge Scheme.
(AQW 20157/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would refer the member to my answer to AQW 19842/11-15 tabled by Alastair Ross and published in the official report on 22 February 2013.

School Meals

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number and average cost of school dinners served in (i) nursery; (ii.) primary; (iii) special; and (iv) post-primary schools, broken down by Education and Library Board, over the last 12 months
(AQW 20169/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of the total number and average cost of school dinners in schools have been provided by the Education and Library Boards and are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Total Number and Average Cost of School Dinners Broken Down by Education and Library Board from 1 April 2011- 31 March 2012

	Nursery	Primary	Special	Post-Primary	Total
BELB					
Pupil Meals	394,795	2,011,002	181,855	773,494	3,361,146
Average Cost per Meal	£2.22	£2.32	£2.32 (primary) £2.52 (postprimary)	£2.52	
NEELB					
Pupil Meals	90,649	2,647,770	103,666	1,509,504	4,351,589
Average Cost per Meal	£2.42	£2.42	£2.42 (primary) £2.62 (postprimary)	£2.62	
SEELB					
Pupil Meals	133,038	2,190,436	125,315	1,160,390	3,609,179
Average Cost per Meal	£2.24	£2.34	£2.34	£2.54	
SELB					
Pupil Meals	291,019	3,430,021	58,938	2,143,683	5,923,661
Average Cost per Meal	£2.28	£2.38	£2.38 (primary) £2.58 (postprimary)	£2.58	
WELB					
Pupil Meals	63,805	3,111,908	98,057	1,796,152	5,069,922
Average Cost per Meal	£2.29	£2.39	£2.39 (primary) £2.59 (postprimary)	£2.59	

The data reflects the position over the period 1 April 2011- 31 March 2012 as this is the last year for which audited and verified expenditure is available. As the price of a meal has changed during this period a weighted average price has been used. Pupil meals include both free and paying pupils.

It should be noted that:

- Some supply kitchens supply meals to a mix of nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools from one site.
- Nursery meal numbers include nursery schools and nursery units in primary schools. The costs in primary schools do not always provide a breakdown of the element associated with nursery units in this regard.
- Special schools comprise a range of age groups which include nursery, primary and post-primary age pupils who will receive different portion sizes. Consequently, different prices are charged to reflect the different age groups and portion size. The SEELB, however, charges one price for a meal provided in a special school.

Due to these variations in the arrangements for the provision of school meals and in how information is subsequently collected and presented it has been necessary to use the pupil meal price and the full cost recovery calculation for a meal as a proxy for the cost of the meal in each sector.

School Closures: Lisnaskea High School

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact on the rural community of south Fermanagh arising from the closure of Lisnaskea High School.
(AQW 20171/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am aware that the Western Education and Library Board is currently processing a statutory Development Proposal to support the merger of Lisnaskea High School with Devenish College. However, until a Proposal is published, the issues involved are a matter for the Western Board to consider.

DE: Staff Travel Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department of staff travel claims in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20192/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost to my Department of staff travel claims in each of the last three years was as follows:

Financial Year	£'000
2009-10	496
2010-11	451
2011-12	408

DE: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20217/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's Information Service comprises a total of 13 staff. Five information officers are responsible for the Departmental website and social media output, media relations, management of webmail queries, update of the NI Direct website, preparation of ministerial briefings relating to school visits and have oversight of internal communications. A Desktop Publishing Unit, comprising 4 staff, provide a design and print service to the Department and 4 administrative staff provide a support service. Five of the staff work reduced hours, therefore the full-time equivalent figure is 11.65.

The cost of salaries for the most recent financial year available (2011-12) was £406,207.

Integrated Services for Children and Young People Project

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how his Department is supporting the continuing development of Integrated Services.
(AQW 20319/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: From 1st October 2012, operational responsibility for the Integrated Services for Children and Young People (ISCYP) project transferred to the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). I am continuing to support the project through the transfer of £200k from the education budget to DHSSPS to help fund the project from October 2012 until March 2013.

One meeting was held between senior Officials in DE and PHA. A number of telephone discussions also took place with Officials in DHSSPS.

As the Belfast Education and Library Board had operational responsibility for the delivery of the project, any additional meetings to progress the new delivery arrangements would have taken place between BELB and PHA.

Given responsibility has transferred details of schools that are currently receiving support from the project would have to be sought directly from DHSSPS.

Integrated Services for Children and Young People Project

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many meetings his officials have had with (i) Public Health Agency; and (ii) Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety officials to progress the new arrangements for Integrated Services.
(AQW 20320/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: From 1st October 2012, operational responsibility for the Integrated Services for Children and Young People (ISCYP) project transferred to the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). I am continuing to support the project through the transfer of £200k from the education budget to DHSSPS to help fund the project from October 2012 until March 2013.

One meeting was held between senior Officials in DE and PHA. A number of telephone discussions also took place with Officials in DHSSPS.

As the Belfast Education and Library Board had operational responsibility for the delivery of the project, any additional meetings to progress the new delivery arrangements would have taken place between BELB and PHA.

Given responsibility has transferred details of schools that are currently receiving support from the project would have to be sought directly from DHSSPS.

Integrated Services for Children and Young People Project

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the schools in (i) North; and (ii) West Belfast which are currently receiving support from the Integrated Services, broken down by sector.
(AQW 20321/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: From 1st October 2012, operational responsibility for the Integrated Services for Children and Young People (ISCYP) project transferred to the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). I am continuing to support the project through the transfer of £200k from the education budget to DHSSPS to help fund the project from October 2012 until March 2013.

One meeting was held between senior Officials in DE and PHA. A number of telephone discussions also took place with Officials in DHSSPS.

As the Belfast Education and Library Board had operational responsibility for the delivery of the project, any additional meetings to progress the new delivery arrangements would have taken place between BELB and PHA.

Given responsibility has transferred details of schools that are currently receiving support from the project would have to be sought directly from DHSSPS.

Department for Employment and Learning

Local Employment Intermediary Service: Moyle Area

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown by district electoral area of the home address location of the present clientele of the Local Employment Intermediary Service within the Moyle District Council.
(AQW 19568/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Network Personnel deliver the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) in the Moyle District Council area and the wider outreach NI Area 2 for clients with a common employability barrier. The table, which has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website at http://www.delni.gov.uk/, provides a breakdown of the number of caseloads and the number of clients who entered employment by electoral areas, since the service began in September 2011.

There are currently 50 active clients; however, the flexible nature of LEMIS allows clients to disengage and re-engage whenever they wish to receive help and support. LEMIS clients can use the service on a voluntary basis at any time that suits them and this will not affect any benefits they may receive.

Local Employment Intermediary Service: Moyle Area

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a breakdown by district electoral area of the home address location of the present clientele of the Local Employment Intermediary Service within the Moyle District Council who have been found full-time employment.
(AQW 19569/11-15)

Dr Farry: Network Personnel deliver the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) in the Moyle District Council area and the wider outreach NI Area 2 for clients with a common employability barrier. The table, which has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website at http://www.delni.gov.uk/, provides a breakdown of the number of caseloads and the number of clients who entered employment by electoral areas, since the service began in September 2011.

There are currently 50 active clients; however, the flexible nature of LEMIS allows clients to disengage and re-engage whenever they wish to receive help and support. LEMIS clients can use the service on a voluntary basis at any time that suits them and this will not affect any benefits they may receive.

South West College

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the 2011/12 Annual Report and Financial Statements of the South West College have been received and approved by the Department and to outline the reasons for any delay.
(AQW 19659/11-15)

Dr Farry: The South West College accounts were signed by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 7 February 2013, received by the Department on 13 February 2013 and laid at the Northern Ireland Assembly on 15 February 2013. There was a delay in finalising the accounts due to a public interest disclosure in respect of the administration of funded projects by the college. An independent review was commissioned to examine the claims and the Northern Ireland Audit Office delayed completion of the external audit until the findings of the review were reported. No adjustments to the accounts were required as a result of the findings.

Youth Employment Scheme

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) businesses; and (ii) young people have signed on to the Youth Employment Scheme; and whether these numbers meet the targets for the scheme
(AQW 19683/11-15)

Dr Farry: At 15th February 525 businesses had entered into at least one agreement to offer young people opportunities under the Youth Employment Scheme. In total 1,076 opportunities have been offered: 721 short, two - eight week work experience

placements, 175 six - nine month skills development opportunities and 180 jobs attracting the enhanced employer subsidy. In total 247 young people have availed of these opportunities: 115 have completed or were engaged in work experience, 26 on skills development and 106 into subsidised employment. In total, 125 young people have entered employment: 19 directly from work experience and 106 via the enhanced employer subsidy.

In addition 250 of the 500 temporary employment opportunities available under the "First Start" strand of the Steps to Work programme had been filled.

Performance against targets for 2012/13 will be assessed at the end of March.

Higher Education: Enrolment Numbers in Cregagh and Stormont Wards

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why there is a notable difference between Cregagh ward and Stormont ward with regard to enrolment numbers in higher education.
(AQW 19707/11-15)

Dr Farry: The broad correlation between areas of high deprivation and low participation rates in higher education is well established and the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure indicates that, out of the 582 wards in Northern Ireland, Stormont is ranked 576 and Cregagh ranked 116 (where 1 is the most deprived and 582 the least deprived).

My Department's Higher Education Strategy, Graduating to Success, has a strong focus on the creation of a more accessible higher education sector and this will be integral to the implementation of "Access to Success" the separate integrated Regional Strategy for Widening Participation in Higher Education. The Department has been supported in the development of "Access to Success" by the Higher Education Institutions, the Further Education Colleges and relevant experts from the public and private sectors, and other government departments. The strategy, therefore, represents the first inter-institutional and Governmental attempt to address this issue.

"Access to Success" targets those students from groups who are under-represented in higher education and one of the key objectives is to raise aspiration and attainment amongst these groups. My Department, in conjunction with the Higher Education institutions, will develop and implement a single integrated regional awareness raising programme to increase the profile and relevance of higher education and skills in under-represented communities. In addition, my Department will make additional funding available to support the expansion of the range of aspiration and attainment raising programmes in schools, colleges the community and the workplace. Overall, the strategy aims to more closely target resources in areas of most need by identifying individual students who are at risk of multiple disadvantage in order to develop appropriate support solutions tailored to individual needs.

Employer Support Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the operation and oversight of the Employer Support Programme in terms of preventing duplicate funding on project claims and whether any incidents of abuse been identified.
(AQW 19735/11-15)

Dr Farry: Each Further Education college involved in the delivery of the Employer Support Programme, must adhere to the relevant Departmental policy circular, as well as a Letter of Offer, which is signed by the college Director, in his capacity as Accounting Officer. The Letter of Offer sets out strict parameters for the programme, and precludes any economic engagement or business support activities funded by other Government sources.

To help provide assurance, my Department commissions an annual audit of college claims by its internal Financial Audit and Support Team.

Additionally, my Department previously commissioned FGS McClure Watters to evaluate the former pilot Employer Support Programme, which included an examination of how activities throughout the programme fitted with other similar programmes, operated by other Government agencies. This report stated that, while there were low risks of potential duplication, there were controls in place to eradicate this.

I am, however, aware of the potential for duplication of funding within the programme and an assurance exercise is to be carried out across the Further Education sector.

Apprenticeship and Training Schemes

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline all current apprenticeship and training schemes that provide employers with a taxation or monetary benefit.
(AQW 19740/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme and the Youth Employment Scheme provide employers with the financial support outlined below.

ApprenticeshipsNI

ApprenticeshipsNI offers training across a wide range of occupational areas to employees who earn a wage while working with experienced staff to learn and develop their skills. An apprentice also receives 'off-the-job' training to work towards achieving a competence based qualification, a knowledge based qualification, and Essential Skills.

For apprentices aged between 16 and 24 years old direct training costs are met in full by my Department. Funding, determined by the level and occupational area, ranges from £2,600 to £10,800. On achievement of a full apprenticeship framework an employer incentive payment ranging from £500 to £1,500 (determined by the funding band) is paid to the apprentice's current employer.

For apprentices aged 25 years old and older, a reduced level of funding is available for apprenticeship training in economically important sectors. On achievement of a full apprenticeship framework the associated employer incentive payment ranges from £250 to £750.

The Youth Employment Scheme

Two strands of the Youth Employment Scheme offer financial support to help employers meet the cost of training. Both the skills development programme and subsidised employment strands offer up to £750 per trainee or employee to help meet the cost of training in sector-specific skills. In these strands the Youth Employment Scheme targets support at sectors that have the potential to help rebuild and rebalance the Northern Ireland economy.

The provision outlined above does not provide employers with taxation benefit. As you will be aware, taxation matters are not devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Should such tax incentives be made available on a UK-wide basis then I would ensure that relevant Northern Ireland policy is enabled to ensure that employers benefit from such measures.

Redundancies: East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the reasons for the 260 confirmed redundancies in East Belfast in 2011.
(AQW 19765/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department was notified of 163 confirmed redundancies for Belfast East Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) in 2011. The table below details the number of confirmed redundancies in Belfast East in 2011, disaggregated by the reason stated by the company for the redundancies on the advance notification of redundancies form (HR1).

Under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (amended 8 October 2006), companies are only legally required to provide notification of the impending redundancy of 20 or more employees at any one site. Also, redundancies do not necessarily equate to job losses; for example, employees who do not qualify for a redundancy package, such as those on temporary contracts, will not be incorporated into the redundancy figures.

Table 1: Confirmed Redundancies by Reason for Belfast East PCA in 2011

Redundancy Reason	Number
Closure/Administration	59
Reduction in Operating budget	14
Reduced demand for products or services	90
Total	**163**

Local Employment Intermediary Service: Ballymoney and Ballymena

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the outreach arrangements in the boroughs of Ballymoney and Ballymena in respect of the Local Employment Intermediary Service; and (ii) and how many clients are currently being assisted in each of these areas.
(AQW 19814/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) has been marketed directly by way of meetings and formal presentations with Ballymena, Coleraine and Limavady Councils (including community development and neighbourhood renewal teams). An information pack promoting awareness of the service was also forwarded to the community development officer within Ballymoney Council. However, networking and developing good relationships with the Jobs & Benefits Offices (JBOs) and specialist agencies in areas, such as the Youth Justice Agency and organisations that deal with drug and alcohol addictions , are the key means of receiving referrals.

In Ballymoney, the largest proportion of referrals comes from staff in the JBO. Referrals have also been received from Holywell hospital and community addictions team, Triangle Housing, the PSNI, Probation Board (PBNI) and the resettlement team in Maghaberry Prison. Client engagement is usually carried out in the confidential interview rooms within Ballymoney JBO.

In Ballymena, referrals come from a wide range of sources such as PSNI, PBNI, Youth Justice Agency, Careers Service, JBO, Hope Centre, Simon Community Hostel, Living Rivers Hostel, Triangle Housing, Threshold, and the Community Addictions Team. Client engagements tend to be undertaken on an outreach basis often on the premises of the referral organisation, or if this is not possible, then an interview room in a JBO is used.

(ii) Since 1 September 2011 when the service became available, a total of 2 clients have been caseloaded from the Ballymoney area. One of these clients is currently active. A total of 26 clients from the Ballymena area have been caseloaded, of whom 11 are currently active.

Local Employment Intermediary Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, using home addresses, to detail the number of people who are availing of the Local Employment Intermediary Service, broken down by council area.
(AQW 19815/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have placed tables in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at http://www.delni.gov.uk/ . The tables at Annex A detail the number of people who have availed of the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS), broken down by council area and the number of people who have found full-time employment, through the Local Employment Intermediary Service, broken down by council area, since LEMIS 2 began in April 2011.

Clients living in LEMIS designated areas are free to choose the services of any provider, except in NI Areas 1, 2 and 3 [see Annex C for details of contract provision in Northern Ireland] where individuals must avail of LEMIS from the contracted provider for those areas.

Local Employment Intermediary Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, using home addresses, to detail the number of people who have found full-time employment through the Local Employment Intermediary Service, broken down by council area.
(AQW 19816/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have placed tables in the Assembly Library and on my department's website at http://www.delni.gov.uk/ . The tables at Annex A detail the number of people who have availed of the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS), broken down by council area and the number of people who have found full-time employment, through the Local Employment Intermediary Service, broken down by council area, since LEMIS 2 began in April 2011.

Clients living in LEMIS designated areas are free to choose the services of any provider, except in NI Areas 1, 2 and 3 [see Annex C for details of contract provision in Northern Ireland] where individuals must avail of LEMIS from the contracted provider for those areas.

DEL: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the total spend on hospitality by his Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19855/11-15)

Dr Farry: The total spend on hospitality by the Department in 2011/12 was £26,872.

University of Ulster: Closure of Childcare Facilities

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions were held before the recent decision was taken to close day care nursery on campus locations; and who was involved in these discussions.
(AQW 19877/11-15)

Dr Farry: On 8 February 2013 the University of Ulster confirmed its decision to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013.

The University has advised that the decision has been taken because the childcare provision has continued to sustain a significant annual deficit of approximately £114k and is therefore no longer economically viable. Also, the University points out that between the two campuses 23 students use the childcare facilities with the majority of students with childcare needs choosing to receive direct financial support in order to avail of childcare facilities closer to their homes/places of residence.

The University states that the change is being implemented with the support of its Student Union. The Student Union has indicated that it was involved in the review of student support under which the crèches fall and that it recognises that the crèches are operating on a significant deficit. It has requested that any monies saved as a result of the closures should be reinvested into effectively supporting student parents with childcare costs.

Also, the University held discussions on the proposal with key stakeholders. In line with agreed procedures when any possible restructuring or closure is being considered, the first meeting took place with the relevant Trade Unions. This was followed by meetings with staff in the day care nurseries and staff from Social Services, the body which has an oversight role in this area. At that stage the discussion centred on the proposed closure pending the completion of an equality screening exercise. All parents with children in the nurseries were informed of the proposed closure by letter.

Further meetings were held with the Trade Unions and with the staff in the nurseries in which the decision to close the nurseries was communicated. At that time parents received a second letter advising them of the decision and a meeting was subsequently held with parents to discuss the decision and the alternatives open to them. The University argues that it was not possible to meet with parents until it had met with the Trade Unions and informed the nursery staff in the first instance.

Stranmillis University College: Board of Governors

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 19318/11-15, what role the Commissioner for Public Appointments had in the decision to re-advertise the post; and how this compares with 2004 when the single applicant was appointed.
(AQW 19880/11-15)

Dr Farry: Before the selection panel made its decision to re-advertise the post of Chairperson of the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College, advice was sought from the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Commissioner had no objections to this proposed course of action.

There is no record of the Commissioner having been approached on a similar issue in 2004.

DEL: Staff Childcare Schemes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures he is taking to support staff within his Department and its agencies in accessing affordable childcare.
(AQW 19906/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning provides assistance to staff with childcare costs under the NICS Salary Sacrifice Scheme. This scheme, in partnership with Employers For Childcare, currently offers Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers to employees. Staff participating in the scheme can exchange part of their salary each month for vouchers to contribute towards their childcare costs. The benefit of this scheme is that participants do not pay income tax or National Insurance Contributions on this amount, yielding potential savings of over £900 per parent each year.

Details of the Scheme are made available to staff via HRConnect, the NICS HR Services provider. The Scheme has also been promoted in the Department's Core Brief to staff, and includes information on Employers for Childcare Road shows.

The Department also provides a facility for the reimbursement of reasonable additional care costs for dependants, incurred when staff are required by the Department to attend work outside their normal working pattern. This is in accordance with the Reimbursement of Additional Care Costs section of the NICS HR Handbook.

Unemployment: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work related schemes are in place to tackle unemployment in North Down.
(AQW 19917/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to reducing unemployment for all individuals across Northern Ireland, irrespective of where they live. Bangor Jobcentre services the North Down Area and offers a range of services, initiatives and programmes to help jobseekers find employment, particularly people who are unemployed, individuals with disabilities and those with other barriers to work. Services include job search, help with writing a CV or job application form, preparing for interviews, careers guidance, or help with travel costs for job interviews.

In the period of April 2012 to December 2012 my Department helped 952 people move from welfare into work in the North Down area.

Steps to Work (StW) programme

All unemployed clients in the North Down area can participate in the StW programme, which is the Department's main adult return to work programme. The aim of StW is to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment.

Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012, Bangor Jobcentre placed 389 StW clients into employment. From 1 April 2012 to date, 291 StW clients have been placed into employment in North Down. There are currently 627 clients from North Down on the StW programme.

Step Ahead 50+

Part of the Executive's recently announced Economy and Jobs Initiative, Step Ahead 50+ is a new targeted initiative introduced in January 2013 and delivered within the StW programme.

Step Ahead 50+ provides temporary employment with organisations within the community/voluntary sector for up to 26 weeks for those aged 50 years or over who have been unemployed and claiming benefits for at least 12 months.

First Start

Another new initiative recently implemented within the StW programme is 'First Start'. Between now and 2014, First Start will support 1,700 waged employment opportunities across Northern Ireland, each lasting a minimum of six months, for young people aged 18 to 24 who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for at least six months.

Youth Employment Scheme (YES)

In March last year the Executive agreed a package of new measures, incorporating the Youth Employment Scheme, to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment.

In the past few months my Department has been actively working with employers to secure opportunities across Northern Ireland. I have been delighted by the response of employers in the North Down area so far and I expect many more to come forward to offer opportunities for young people in the coming months. We are now focusing our efforts on the young unemployed and are encouraging them to participate in the Scheme.

Pathways to Work

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people with health conditions and disabilities move into employment. Currently there are 382 clients participating on the programme in the North Down area.

YMCA Craft Programme

Last September, a programme entitled C.R.A.F.T. (Careers Related Advice and Further Training), which is a joint initiative between my Department, North Down YMCA and the South Eastern Regional College (SERC), was piloted in the Bangor area. 11 young people in the 18-24 year old cohort participated in this programme and the outcomes were very positive. The C.R.A.F.T. programme comprises an 8 week structured programme of Careers Guidance Clinics, Employment Adviser liaison and a series of personal development and training opportunities provided by SERC and the North Down YMCA.

Other Departmental training programmes, such as Apprenticeships NI and Training for Success, are also available across Northern Ireland. These opportunities are open to eligible people from all areas and staff at the Bangor Jobcentre can provide advice on all of the programmes and initiatives available.

University of Ulster: Magee Campus Day Care Facilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to day care facilities at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster, to outline; (i) the financial deficit over the last ten years; (ii) any funding prior to and since the construction of the dedicated facility that was received from the EU; and (iii) what oversight was provided by the University to manage the finances of the unit.
(AQW 20257/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold the information requested. However, my officials have contacted the University of Ulster and have been advised that the financial out-turn for the Magee campus day care facility for each of the last ten years was follows. Figures in brackets represent a deficit.

02/03	3,140
03/04	(20,015)
04/05	(11,799)
05/06	(26,919)
06/07	(49,731)
07/08	(52,693)
08/09	(57,552)
09/10	(65,916)
10/11	(38,782)
11/12	(34,762)

The University has also confirmed that a grant of £193,500 was received from the European Union in 1999 towards the construction of the facility. No EU funding has been received since then.

Management oversight of the facility is provided by professional student support staff. Additionally a nominated individual in the University's Finance Department has responsibility for the preparation of the nursery accounts which includes the provision of financial advice.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

DETI: Hospitality Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the total spend on hospitality by her Department in 2011/12.
(AQW 19629/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The total spend by DETI on hospitality in 2011/12 was £16,986.

Fuel Prices

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the Executive's strategy and action plans for securing reduced fuel prices for local consumers, particularly electricity, home heating oil, petrol and diesel.
(AQW 19694/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive approved Strategic Energy Framework, published by my Department in September 2010, addresses the issue of encouraging competitive energy pricing under a number of actions. In particular, ensuring there is transparency in setting of electricity and gas prices, encouraging more companies to enter the gas and electricity markets and helping to create conditions which more readily facilitate customer switching.

In addition, my Department is committed to extending the natural gas network to further towns in the West and North West, including Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Enniskillen/Derrylin and Strabane. This will give both business and domestic consumers in the new licence area access to a wider, and potentially cheaper, choice of fuel.

My Department has also recently introduced support measures to encourage domestic and commercial customers to utilise innovative renewable heating technologies. The Renewable Heat Premium Payment scheme for domestic consumers and the Renewable Heat Incentive for the non-domestic market provide financial support for those wishing to move away from conventional fossil fuels, such as home heating oil.

Whilst my Department has no statutory role in setting electricity prices my officials continue to maintain close contact with the Utility Regulator regarding energy prices, given its important role in electricity and gas regulation.

Retail prices for a range of filling station products and home heating oil fall outside the scope of my Department.

Invest NI: Innovation Voucher Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures are in place to prevent Invest NI funding, particularly relating to innovation vouchers from being abused through double funding on project claims, for example under the Employer Support Programme administered by the Department for Employment and Learning, and have there been any occasions when this has occurred, and with what consequences.
(AQW 19731/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Innovation Voucher scheme has robust procedures in place which are

accredited under ISO9001 and subject to regular audits. To avoid instances of potential double funding the following measures are in place:

- On the application form, applicants declare that the project in the application is not already in receipt of, or likely to be in receipt of any other public funding.
- Successful voucher applicants choose a Knowledge Provider who agrees a Terms of Reference for the project. This outlines the stages of the project, timescale and cost. The Knowledge Provider confirms in writing that there is no conflict of interest in relation to their engagement as the knowledge provider on the Project. Invest NI assess all project Terms of Reference prior to the issue of a purchase order direct to the Knowledge Provider. No payment is made to the business.
- On completion of a voucher project, the Knowledge Provider provides a copy of the final report to Invest NI. All reports are reviewed against the original Letter of Notification for quality and challenged if necessary prior to payment being made to the Knowledge Provider.
- Invest NI is unaware of any occasion when funding relating to innovation vouchers has been abused through double funding on project claims, for example under the Employer Support Programme administered by the Department for Employment and Learning.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning has informed me that each Further Education (FE) college involved in the delivery of the Employer Support Programme (ESP) must adhere to the relevant policy circular (FE 14/11), as well as a Letter of Offer, which is signed by the college Director, in his capacity as Accounting Officer. The Letter of Offer sets out strict parameters for the programme, and specifically precludes any economic engagement or business support activities funded by other Government sources, including innovation vouchers.

To help assure this, the Department for Employment and Learning liaises with Invest NI on a regular basis and commissions an annual audit of college claims by its internal Financial Audit and Support Team.

Additionally, the Department previously commissioned FGS McClure Watters to evaluate the former pilot Employer Support Programme, which included an examination of how activities throughout the programme fitted with other similar programmes, operated by other Government agencies. This report stated that, while there were low risks of potential duplication, there were controls in place to eradicate this.

The Department for Employment and Learning remains aware of the potential for duplication of funding within the programme and is currently implementing an assurance exercise across the FE sector.

Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how applications can be made for the new £5 million loan fund for small businesses.
(AQW 19754/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Ulster Community Investment plc (a subsidiary of Ulster Community Investment Trust) was awarded the contract to manage the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund on behalf of Invest NI. Applications can be made to the fund managers by first completing an enquiry form available through any of the following sources:

1 On-line at www.nisblf.com;

2 By calling 0800 988 2879; or

3 By e-mailing enquiry@nisblf.com.

The fund manager will then contact applicants for more details and assess the loan applications on receipt of the additional information.

Invest NI: Support for Companies in East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why Invest NI support for companies in East Belfast fell from £28.62 million in 2010/11 to £13.27 million in 2011/12.
(AQW 19764/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The actual number of offers made by Invest NI to businesses in East Belfast during 2010-11 was lower than in 2011-12, with a total of 195 and 262 made respectively. However, the results are skewed somewhat by the fact that 2010-11 was an exceptional year where four offers alone added to some £19.6 million worth of assistance, resulting in almost £90 million worth of investment in the East Belfast economy.

These figures empahsise the fact that Invest NI has limited scope for 'directing' investment to specific areas and whilst it is able to influence the location decisions of some inward-investment projects, assistance patterns are demand-led by businesses wishing to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets. In the case of established businesses, reinvestment patterns will usually be determined by the existing location of the business. In addition, individual company expansion plans will also be influenced by prevailing economic conditions. For these reasons, there will always be year on year fluctuations in the levels of support within specific areas.

Invest NI continues to offer a wide range of support to encourage the start up and growth of businesses in East Belfast. Invest NI's Boosting Business initiative, encompassing support under five themes: Jobs, R&D, Exports, Technology and Skills, is available to local businesses in the area. From the 1st April 2012 to date, Invest NI's Business Support Team has handled 232 queries from the East Belfast area, and under the EU's Local Economic Development Measure, Invest NI continues to work closely with Belfast City Council to develop a range of projects that will deliver a range of tailored support to local businesses in Belfast.

Bankruptcy Cases

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of bankruptcy cases in the current financial year, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 19790/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the number of people made bankrupt broken down by constituency from 1 April 2012 to 13 February 2013.

Constituency	2012/13
Belfast East	46
Belfast North	58
Belfast South	75
Belfast West	36
East Antrim	59

Constituency	2012/13
East Londonderry	55
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	64
Foyle	87
Lagan Valley	72
Mid Ulster	58
Newry & Armagh	83
North Antrim	53
North Down	58
South Antrim	69
South Down	85
Strangford	55
Upper Bann	55
West Tyrone	65
Unknown(1)	63

(1) The number of bankruptcies where postcode data was unavailable

Vacant Factory Space: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of former factory space that is vacant in North Down.
(AQW 19820/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI maintains an online database which contains the details of a range of available properties across both the private and public sectors. This information, whilst not available at the parliamentary constituency level, can be filtered by council area.

Invest NI is aware of 12 available factories within the North Down council area. Further details on these and other available commercial properties can be found on the NI Business Information website:

www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/search-commercial-property-northern-ireland

It is, however, important to be aware that the information within the database does not comprise a definitive list of all available properties. Invest NI is wholly reliant upon the accuracy of the information provided to it by commercial property agents and developers.

Tourism: Certification Requirements for Accommodation

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there will be an exemption from current legislation to allow for pop-up accommodation and a residential rent-a-room scheme.
(AQW 19852/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under the Tourism (NI) Order 1992, any proposal for an exemption to the certification requirements for accommodation requires a site specific business case to be submitted to my Department for approval. Until such a business case is received, the Department cannot consider, or conclude on, whether an exemption should be granted.

In the case of potential accommodation demand around UK City of Culture events, it is the responsibility of Derry City Council to assess the need and liaise with NITB to ensure that, in the event that a request for an exemption is deemed necessary and appropriate, a business case is developed and presented to the Department for consideration.

Shale Oil

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to the awarding of licences for the extraction of shale oil.
(AQW 19883/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under the terms of the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 my Department grants licences to search and bore for and get petroleum in Northern Ireland. The petroleum legislation makes no distinction between the different types of petroleum (oil or gas) or the geological formations (e.g. shale or sandstone) in which the petroleum may be found.

The extraction of oil or gas is subject to my Department's approval of a development plan submitted by the Licensee. Such a plan would only follow an extensive programme of exploration and appraisal and it would also be subject to a number of other consents including planning permission.

City of Culture 2013

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is considering allocating future additional resource to support the marketing of Derry City in its role as City of Culture 2013.
(AQW 19899/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has successfully secured £400,000 for a bespoke marketing campaign to support Londonderry as UK City of Culture 2013.

In addition I am seeking a further £600,000 for the remainder of 2013 as part of the advertising approvals process for 2013/14. If approved, this will result in my Department providing total support of £1m to the UK City of Culture advertising campaign.

City of Culture and the One Marketing Plan

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 19087/11-15, whether permission to spend has been granted for the Tourist Board to deliver the £1m media campaign for Derry; and for an update on the One Marketing Campaign for Derry which was submitted to her Department in 2012.
(AQW 19901/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can confirm that approval for expenditure of £400,000 has been granted to deliver a bespoke marketing campaign this financial year, in support of Londonderry as UK City of Culture 2013. I am also seeking approval for a further £600,000 of campaign expenditure for the remainder of 2013 as part of the 2013/14 financial year approvals process.

As the responsibility for the development and delivery of the One Marketing Plan rests with Derry City Council, my Department and its agencies are not in a position to provide an update.

Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQWs 18021/11-15 and 19123/11-15, when her Department agreed to a technical variation to the work programme of Tamboran resources.
(AQW 19904/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A technical variation to the work programme of Tamboran resources was agreed to on 28 May 2012.

Shale Oil

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has been informed of any proposals to extract shale oil; and to provide details of what methods of shale oil extraction that are being considered.
(AQW 19908/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has not been informed of any proposals to extract shale oil in Northern Ireland.

Wind Farms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there are any plans to create more wind farms.
(AQW 19920/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework, agreed by the Executive, set a target of 40% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020. This target is technology neutral and it will be for the private sector to bring forward development plans which contribute to the target.

Oil or Gas Extraction

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the financial benefits of oil or gas extraction from the coastline.
(AQW 19922/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Taxable profits from the production of oil or gas in the United Kingdom are subject to Ring Fence Corporation Tax (RFCT) and a Supplementary Charge on the company's ring fence profits. RFCT is levied at 30% and the current rate of the Supplementary Charge is 32%, although a Field Allowance was introduced in 2009 to reduce the impact of the Supplementary Charge on new marginal fields. The UK oil and gas fiscal regime is administered by HM Revenue & Customs, Large Business Service Oil & Gas Sector from whom further information is available.

Oil or gas production onshore Northern Ireland is also subject to a 7.5% 'royalty' payable to the former owners of the rights in minerals and petroleum.

In some circumstances it may be more advantageous to develop oil and gas resources that lie beneath the seabed close to the coast from a coastal onshore location rather than from an offshore platform, for a variety of economic, environmental or engineering reasons.

Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the recently-launched NI Small Business Loan Fund could help start-up businesses such as the Ice Dome at Sandy Row, Belfast.
(AQW 19951/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

1 Any business applying to the Northern Ireland Small Business Loan Fund must be substantially based in Northern Ireland and must provide evidence of funding decline from the private banking sector in support of all loan applications.

2 There is a maximum loan amount of £15,000 to start-up enterprises, with potential for follow-on lending up to £50,000.

3 Start-up businesses such as the Ice Dome at Sandy Row which wish to enquire about potential funding from the Fund should contact the fund managers, Ulster Community Investment plc through any of the following means:

(a) On-line at www.nisblf.com;

(b) By calling 0800 988 2879; or

(c) By e-mailing enquiry@nisblf.com.

Multilingual Signage: Down District Council Area

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has refused to provide funding for multi-lingual signage in the Down District Council area.
(AQW 19980/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not refused to provide funding for multilingual signage in the Down District Council area.

Multilingual Signage: Down District Council Area

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide the dates on which communication has been made between (i) the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Down District Council; (ii) her Department and Down District Council; and (iii) her Department and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, in relation to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board refused to provide funding for multi-language signage in the Down District Council area.
(AQW 19981/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 19980/11-15.

No communication has been made on this basis.

Tourism: Funding Applications Involving the Irish Language

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all cases where the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has turned down applications for funding involving the use of the Irish language and to indicate the reasons in each case.
(AQW 20004/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not turned down any applications for funding involving the use of the Irish language.

Tourism: Multilingual Road Signs

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, when considering the most cost effective way to promote tourism signage through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, what are the cost implications of a number of languages in addition to English being used on signage.
(AQW 20106/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not possible to provide an overall cost as this will vary by project depending on the number, size and shape of signage required, as well as the number of languages to be incorporated.

NITB is keen to ensure that all tourist interpretation and signage is clear; not confusing; and assists the visitor in understanding the importance of the destination.

City of Culture and the One Marketing Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the recent £400k funding announced for marketing City of Culture 2013 will be used to implement the One Marketing Plan which was submitted by Derry City Council, or whether it will be used by the Tourist Board for its own plans.
(AQW 20223/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The delivery and development of the One Marketing Plan is the remit and responsibility of Derry City Council.

This extra investment of £400,000 will integrate with the One Marketing Plan, but be delivered by The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). These monies will be used for a bespoke Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture campaign in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This is additional to the activity already being delivered by NITB to support marketing efforts for the City of Culture including strong coverage of the City in the current Spring 2013 campaign and the delivery of a bespoke Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture Events Guide to every home in Northern Ireland (750,000 residential homes).

I welcome this additional funding and am fully satisfied that every opportunity to promote the city in this momentous year is being fully maximised.

Department of the Environment

National Parks

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment what quantitative research has been carried out with the public to establish their attitude towards national parks (i) within the proposed areas; and (ii) throughout the rest of Northern Ireland.
(AQW 16925/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Last year my Department published a comprehensive consultation document on enabling legislation for national parks to gauge public reaction. The responses that were submitted, together with my ongoing meetings with interested stakeholders, will help to inform my decision on the most appropriate way forward with this issue.

National Parks: North Antrim

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, in giving consideration to a proposed national park in the North Antrim area, to detail the geographical boundaries of such a proposal.
(AQW 16962/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The boundaries of any national park can only be considered as part of the process to designate a park. At this stage, the debate is around the principle of national parks, benefits and disadvantages. Any issue of boundary would only arise later, following any agreement on and passage of legislation.

Giants' Causeway: Visit by UNESCO

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has been contacted by UNESCO in regard to a visit to the World Heritage Site at the Giants' Causeway; and if so, when he was contacted.
(AQW 17097/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have made it very clear to UNESCO that I will have fully assisted in the visit by a representative to the WHS, in order to assess its overall state of conservation and to provide technical advice, given the developments on the WHS in recent times.

Giants' Causeway: Visit by UNESCO

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he has taken secure a visit for UNESCO to the World Heritage Site at the Giants' Causeway.
(AQW 17118/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have made it very clear to UNESCO that I will have fully assisted in the visit by a representative to the WHS, in order to assess its overall state of conservation and to provide technical advice, given the developments on the WHS in recent times.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment what aspects of local government reform are running two or more full calendar months behind schedule; and when he expects these aspects to be completed.
(AQW 17427/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The scale of local government reform is complex and challenging, so there will be times and places where the timetable changes. That is inevitable and it is necessary, but the overall programme from a DOE perspective and responsibility is on track.

In the past few months the Department has particularly been refining the local government reform timetable, particularly reviewing work in progress and making adjustments to the target dates for specific areas of work, which is normal practice in programme management terms.

In some areas there is cause and time to adjust timescales in order to carry out further work. For example, I decided to slightly delay the introduction of the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill to the Assembly until early 2013, to enable further engagement with local government on complex finance and human resources issues and to allow further provisions to be drafted on a number of issues, including dual mandate.

I am therefore content that for those areas of the programme under my control, I can advise that no aspects are running two or more calendar months behind schedule.

I will arrange for the most recent timetable to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Drumclay Crannóg

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the artefacts excavated from Drumclay Crannóg being put on permanent display at Fermanagh County Museum.
(AQW 17673/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA Built Heritage has already talked with the Manager of Fermanagh County Museum about creating an exhibition of the Drumclay finds. Due to the nature of the post-excavation work which will be necessary to study and conserve these finds it will be time before this is achieved. Officials in NIEA have been advised by officials in Fermanagh District Council that the Council is in the process of applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to develop a new display area.

I know of other proposals in relation to the management and presentation of the artefacts. For that reason I intend to convene a gathering of interested persons to identify how to maximise the opportunities for the Crannóg works.

National Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 16919/11-15, how the proposed national parks will help 20,000 unemployed people into work.
(AQW 17838/11-15)

Mr Attwood: National parks elsewhere provide some direct employment, but their impact can be felt more fully in terms of the boost they give to existing businesses and the encouraging environment they provide for the creation of new ones. Some have suggested that national parks provide only part-time, tourist-related jobs. This is not the full story. In the current economic climate we need all the jobs we can get, both full- and part-time. In some of our rural communities, part-time employment can be the difference between people being able to remain in their own locality and having to move away.

National parks are just one way in which to create opportunities for the unemployed. With so many expected to be out of work after welfare reform – and this will be a long-term problem – we need to identify potential employment opportunities. I will therefore continue to meet with interested parties, and consider all that they have to say, before taking a decision on the most appropriate way forward.

It seems a self evident point but one which needs to be made – the economic contribution of our historic environment is substantial but can be multiplied, to have the scale of return in other parts of these islands. To do so requires the protection, the positive development and promotion of our heritage, particularly rural, to, for example, grow tourism to a £1 billion pa industry. Our countryside, rural offering and rural industries are at the heart of economic opportunity. National Parks may or may not be rejected – but rural development and jobs can contribute to addressing not only the in scale represented in potentially 20,000 more being out of work but in tackling the existing 64,000 out of work.

National Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 16919/11-15, to list the parties with whom he had private meetings; and to detail the content and outcomes of these meetings.
(AQW 17841/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have met with a wide variety of groups, including the Ulster Farmers' Union, Mourne Heritage Trust, the Institute of Directors, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and with Moyle District Council, amongst others.

These meetings provide the opportunity for me both to explain my rationale for advocating national parks and to listen to the opinions and concerns of others. They allow for frank and serious face-to-face discussion in private, as I take stock of where we are in relation to national parks. Such meetings play a valuable role in helping me to determine where we go from here in a situation where there has been some very vocal opposition to the idea of national parks.

I will therefore continue to meet with interested parties, and consider all that they have to say, before taking a decision on the most appropriate way forward.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.
(AQW 17892/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I refer the member to my answer of 11 December 2012 in respect of AQO 1302/11-15 in which I stated that it is my intention that the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will be adopted around the end of March 2013 and potentially into April 2013, as habitat and equality obligations are currently being satisfied.

Raymond McCreesh Play Park

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what steps have been taken to encourage Newry and Mourne District Council to review its naming of a play park after an IRA terrorist; and how he is seeking to resolve this matter.
(AQW 18035/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge that the decision taken by the Council has been upsetting and caused anger. I believe that, in living up to the values and ambitions of the Good Friday agreement, there is a responsibility for leadership to demonstrate a commitment to survivors and a process of truth recovery and working to be respectful and sensitive to the needs of victims and the primacy of their needs.

It is the case that Councils are independent of central government and are accountable to their local electorate and ratepayers. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that all public authorities, including district councils, in carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland, shall have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between certain specified individuals and groups, and have desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and religious group.

All district councils are directly answerable to the Equality Commission in respect of their Section 75 Duties. I understand that the Equality Commission has written to Newry and Mourne District Council about its decision.

That said, I am writing to the Chief Executive of the Council requesting a report on the process leading to the decision and on all matters relevant to the making of the decision.

Raymond McCreesh Play Park

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he will intervene in Newry and Mourne Council's decision to name a children's play park after an IRA member; (ii) what are the corporate implications for the Council should it be found to have broken the law by glorifying terrorism; and (iii) what input the Council's Good Relations department had in the naming of the play park.
(AQW 18041/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge that the decision taken by the Council has been upsetting and caused anger. I believe that, in living up to the values and ambitions of the Good Friday agreement, there is a responsibility for leadership to demonstrate a commitment to survivors and a process of truth recovery and working to be respectful and sensitive to the needs of victims and the primacy of their needs.

It is the case that Councils are independent of central government and are accountable to their local electorate and ratepayers. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that all public authorities, including district councils, in carrying out their functions in Northern Ireland, shall have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between certain specified individuals and groups, and have desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and religious group.

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That said, I am writing to the Chief Executive of the Council requesting a report on the process leading to the decision and on all matters relevant to the making of the decision.

Review of Public Administration

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the timescale for achieving cost savings to the rate payer as a result of local government reform; and whether these savings will be passed on to the rate payer.
(AQW 18246/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The economic appraisal of local government service delivery, published by PricewaterhouseCoopers in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years and achieve savings of £438 million over twenty-five years.

Under this option, it is estimated that the reform programme will begin to realise a reduction in operating costs by 2017/18 with a break-even point in terms of return on the initial investment by 2020/21.

The Regional Transition Committee has commissioned the senior local and central government officers and officials in the Finance Working Group to re-examine the costs and benefits of the local government reform programme.

Work is ongoing with the existing councils and the Voluntary Transition Committees in developing the detailed costs and benefits of the key reform work-streams, identified by the Finance Working Group.

The group's findings and recommendations will be presented to the Regional Transition Committee in March 2013.

Any decisions as to whether savings achieved as a result of local government reform will be passed on to the rate payer will be for the 11 new councils to determine. My view is that with 11 Councils, the escalation of sharing/collaboration between Councils, procurement that supports the local but is also green and value for money (etc) should mean benefits in rate levels to ratepayers.

Sellafield Nuclear Processing Plant

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the extent of his Department's lobbying of and contact with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding accidents which have occurred at the Sellafield Nuclear Processing Plant in the last four years.
(AQW 18332/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At present nuclear energy and nuclear installations are excepted matters under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and, as such, are not within my Department's remit.

My Department has responsibility for monitoring the environment in Northern Ireland to assess the impact of radioactivity produced elsewhere.

A continuing programme of monitoring the effect of radioactive discharges from nuclear installations in Britain on the Northern Ireland coastline has shown that levels of contamination are negligible in terms of impact on the Northern Ireland population or our marine environment, but I remain very vigilant in this matter.

I take a very close interest in what is happening in relation to developing new nuclear power plants in Britain and I wrote to the Infrastructure Planning Commission in February this year, expressing concern about the potential environmental impact of proposed nuclear power plants in the west of England and Wales and, in particular, the possible effect on the population of Ireland, north and south, given the proximity of the proposed facilities.

I can provide an assurance that, in conjunction with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII), discharges into the Irish Sea and their impact on the coastline of Northern Ireland will continue to be comprehensively monitored.

Officials from my Department play a part in ensuring that the United Kingdom's obligations under the 1992 Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR) for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic are monitored. This includes ensuring that effective evaluation takes place of actual discharges into the marine environment, and that national plans are in place for the monitoring and control of future discharges.

The monitoring programme includes checks on radiation levels on the coastline at approximately 50 locations around Northern Ireland, as well as routine checks on the levels of radioactivity in seaweed, shellfish and fish. The adequacy of the monitoring programme is reviewed annually, and where appropriate will take into account any changes in the discharges of radioactivity from Sellafield.

My officials have also worked closely with their counterparts in Britain to formalise a national plan for reducing discharges of radioactive substances – the UK Strategy for Radioactive Discharges 2006-2030 – and they will continue to monitor the impact of Sellafield and other nuclear power plants on our environment.

My Department is responsible for regulating, and legislating on, matters relating to the management of radioactive waste. This includes participation in the Managing Radioactive Waste Safely programme.

This programme was initiated in 2001 by the UK Government and the devolved administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the aim of addressing the legacy of radioactive waste from a variety of different nuclear energy programmes in the United Kingdom.

In addition NIEA, together with SEPA, EA and the Health Protection Agency (HPA), has been carrying out public reassurance monitoring to demonstrate that environmental radioactivity remains within internationally agreed safety limits and poses no risks to human health.

Radiation levels in the UK are monitored regularly by the Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). This network includes 95 monitors stationed across the UK, including five in Northern Ireland, to detect increases in background levels of radiation. Any evidence of a nuclear incident of radiological significance for the UK would result in a national alert being raised. These monitors have not detected any increase in the background level of radiation since the Fukushima incident.

There is also a UK-wide arrangement for sampling air and rainwater as part of the UK's duty under the Euratom Treaty. There are seven fixed sampling stations throughout the UK including one at Conlig, County Down. Analysis of the filters from these stations can detect much lower levels of radioactive materials.

In line with the rest of the UK, the frequency of air and rainwater sampling has increased. Results for Northern Ireland to date are comparable with those obtained in the rest of the UK and Ireland and demonstrate that there is no risk to public health or to the environment.

I am advised that the Department has not made representations with, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding accidents which have occurred at the Sellafield nuclear processing plant in the 30 years before I became Minister.

Planning Applications

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current guidance for an application being removed from mainstream planning and being sent to, or requested by, the Minister for consideration; and what is the time frame for a decision on such an application.
(AQW 18410/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the processing of an application, I regularly correspond with MLAs who have written on behalf of constituents and objectors in connection with certain planning applications. That is proper and I will continue to fulfil that function.

In exercising my responsibility for the direction and control of the functions of the Department consistent with statute and the Ministerial Code, I have a legitimate interest in decision making within the Department.

As Minister, it is therefore appropriate that I take a close interest in the operation and effectiveness of the planning functions of the Department. This interest can extend to scrutiny of the management of individual planning applications so that I can be satisfied that the planning functions of the Department are being undertaken effectively or to respond to any issues of concern raised by elected representatives or others.

In terms of timescales, ambitious targets have been set for the processing of planning applications received on or after 1 April 2012. Recently published statistics have highlighted that DOE Planning is providing a speedier, more decisive service, fitter for purpose to strengthen our economy without compromising on protecting the environment.

That said, there will be times when the proper consideration of an application will take further time, may involve the input from senior management, require inspection of sites and assess exhaustively material considerations.

I have received representations from MLAs across parties to look at and consider planning applications. When this is done for proper planning reasons, this is an important role for a Minister.

Review of Public Administration: Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to ensure that a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration plan is embedded within councils following the reform of local government.
(AQW 18478/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I firmly believe that central and local Government must live up in spirit and substance to the values and practices of "agreement politics". Recent events confirm the challenge that has yet to be met and the renewed leadership that is required

At the first meeting of the RPA Political reference group on 19/12 and given current circumstances, I raised the issue of flags in the context of council reorganisation. I said there may be a need for this issue to be addressed in the rundown to reform. There may also prove to be a need to also address wider cohesion, sharing and integration issues. If so, that is the approach I will adopt, conscious that Councils in various ways in a number of places are addressing positively CSI issues.

I agree fully that a CSI approach should be embedded in Councils now and in the future. I will look to see if and how this might be done. But it must be all the issues central to CSI, not just some, and all should be addressed comprehensively. Clearly, I will carefully monitor what the political parties together may or may not do and, as CSI is an FMDFM function, what that office is doing. That said, should I need to take forward an RPA/Council initiative, I will seek to do so.

Review of Public Administration: Symbols and Flags

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to seek agreement between all the councils on the issues of symbols and flags following the reform of local government.
(AQW 18479/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At the first meeting before Christmas of the Local Government Political Reference Group - to which all Assembly parties are invited - I raised the issues of flags and related matters. I stated that given the profile and importance of the issue, it may be an issue that the PRG may require to address in the rundown to RPA.

If this needs to be done – as it may – the challenge should not be shirked. I will make an assessment of if this is needed – but will clearly have regard to what is or is not happening around other discussions.

Councils are independent of central government and are accountable to their local electorate and ratepayers. All councils have the same legislative powers, but each has the discretion – currently - to place the relevant emphasis on matters within their control.

That said, all district councils are directly answerable to the Equality Commission in respect of their Section 75 Duties. They must and must be seen to comply with these requirements.

Family Car Parking Spaces

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how he plans to use the planning system to ensure the better provision of family car parking spaces.
(AQW 18596/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am currently considering a number of options in relation to how to use the planning system to provide better provision of car parking for both family parking and pregnant women.

I intend to bring forward proposals for this through the single Strategic Planning Policy Statement which will be made available for public consultation before the end of 2013.

Planning Applications: Sprucefield

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what impact his announcement in January 2013 on the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan Retail Strategy will have on the public inquiry into the John Lewis planning application at Sprucefield; and whether altering the planning ground rules at this stage permits a fair process.
(AQW 18614/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department was considering a major Article 31 planning application for a retail scheme including a Department Store, 19 Retail Units, restaurants and associated infrastructural development at Sprucefield, Lisburn for Sprucefield Centre Limited (S/2009/1045/F). The applicant had indicated that the intended occupant of the Department Store associated with this development is John Lewis Ltd so the scale of the Sprucefield proposal was 20 shops and many restaurants. It was many more than John Lewis, a fact that is increasingly recognised. In order to inform my decision on this major planning application my Department had asked the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to convene a Public Inquiry to hear evidence and prepare a report on its findings. The PAC had set a timetable for the Public Inquiry (PI) to open on the 15 April 2013.

To facilitate the preparation of evidence for the Public inquiry the PAC asked me to release my Department's decisions on their recommendations about elements of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 relating to Sprucefield. In order to provide certainty and clarity for participants in the Inquiry I issued a statement to this effect on the 11 January 2013. This publication constitutes advance notice of what the Department intends to adopt in the final plan subject to completion of all statutory procedures. There are a number of issues which the Inquiry would have had to carefully consider including the economic impacts of the proposal and the relevant planning policy context.

I am disappointed that the PI will not now proceed. My advice to the PAC had been informed and was faithful to the Executive approved RDS 2035 and planning policy statements; was in the context of shop vacancies and economic downturn; on the assessed retail impact on town and city centres in Greater Belfast and beyond and how this would manifest in job losses and shop closures, and how retail should develop in Greater Belfast going forward.

There was no change in planning rules. In fact, I held to planning rules, policy and regional strategy. In doing so, it was the right advice, at the right time and for the right retail outcome.

Planning NI

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what responsibility Planning NI has (i) to meet with the objectors to planning applications; and (ii) to respond to the specifics of objections once planning permission has been granted.
(AQW 18645/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In dealing with a planning application, the Department is required to have regard to the development plan and any other material planning considerations.

Public opinion in the form of objection is a material planning consideration which must always be fully taken into account. The key issue in considering public opinion is for the specific grounds to be noted and balanced against other relevant factors.

During the processing of planning applications, it may be necessary to inform objectors of changes, amendments or additional information – this will generally be done in writing. However, depending on the nature and volume of objections, it may be considered appropriate to meet with objectors to discuss particular issues of concern.

Similarly, where the Department's opinion is presented to Council, and a deferral on planning grounds is secured, DOE Planning will participate in a meeting to enable issues, including those raised by objectors to be discussed.

In the processing of any application, DOE Planning will take account of objections submitted up until the point that a decisions issues and objectors will be notified of the final decision including were appropriate. If an objection is received following this issuing of a decision notice, DOE Planning may advise on the assessment of issues raised in reaching its decision.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to confirm the total costs and savings arising from local government reform as projected in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report.
(AQW 18659/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The PricewaterhouseCoopers' economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years and achieve savings of £438 million over twenty-five years.

The Regional Transition Committee has commissioned the senior local and central government officers and officials in the Finance Working Group to re-examine the costs and benefits of the local government reform programme taking account a range of financial factors. These include the 2015 timescale for reform set out in the Programme for Government 2011-15, the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency proposals and the changed economic climate in which reform is now being taken forward.

Work is ongoing with the existing councils and the Voluntary Transition Committees in developing the detailed costs and benefits of the key reform work-streams, identified by the Finance Working Group.

The group's findings and recommendations will be presented to the Regional Transition Committee in March 2013.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the current projected cost of local Government reform; (ii) the current projected savings that will be achieved; and (iii) the level of funding that will be made available to local Government by the Executive to meet the costs of transformation.
(AQW 18660/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The PricewaterhouseCoopers economic appraisal of local government service delivery, carried out on behalf of and published by the Department in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration), implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years and achieve savings of £438 million over twenty-five years.

The Regional Transition Committee has commissioned the senior local and central government officers and officials in the Finance Working Group to re-examine the costs and benefits of the local government reform programme taking account a range of financial factors. These include the 2015 timescale for reform set out in the Programme for Government 2011-15, the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency proposals and the changed economic climate in which reform is now being taken forward.

Work is ongoing with the existing councils and the Voluntary Transition Committees in developing the detailed costs and benefits of the key reform work-streams, identified by the Finance Working Group.

The group's findings and recommendations will be presented to the Regional Transition Committee in March 2013.

In relation to Executive funding for local government reform, my bids to the Executive for local government reform funding in the past two Monitoring Rounds were not successful. However, I continue to press for my paper, seeking the Executive's agreement to fund the transition costs that will not release any long term cash savings to be formally considered by the Executive.

Councils: Finances

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) amount owed from borrowing; (ii) current rates level; and (iii) penny product for each local council.
(AQW 18662/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Answers to the questions can be found in the tables below. Penny product values have been provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel.

(i) Position of Council Debt as of 31 March 2012 is recorded in the table below.
NB: GLF = Government Loan Fund administered by Department of Finance and Personnel.

Council	Non GLF Capital Debt £	GLF Capital Debt £	Total £
Antrim	5,000,000	14,817,656	19,817,656
Ards	7,775,000	5,977,224	13,752,224
Armagh	0	26,929,965	26,929,965
Ballymena	0	26,239,361	26,239,361

Council	Non GLF Capital Debt £	GLF Capital Debt £	Total £
Ballymoney	0	9,533,362	9,533,362
Banbridge	0	20,704,940	20,704,940
Belfast	3,000,000	25,465,855	28,465,855
Carrickfergus	1,620,144	19,809,064	21,429,208
Castlereagh	0	17,856,096	17,856,096
Coleraine	14,275,438	21,563,345	35,838,783
Cookstown	0	1,450,468	1,450,468
Craigavon	6,500,000	1,464,823	7,964,823
Derry	0	25,476,154	25,476,154
Down	0	23,365,257	23,365,257
Dungannon & S Tyrone	0	5,227,982	5,227,982
Fermanagh	0	3,331,959	3,331,959
Larne	0	15,722,967	15,722,967
Limavady	0	12,660,161	12,660,161
Lisburn	0	19,997,814	19,997,814
Magherafelt	0	0	0
Moyle	0	8,659,895	8,659,895
Newry & Mourne	0	18,772,166	18,772,166
Newtownabbey	0	46,836,936	46,836,936
North Down	0	36,888,706	36,888,706
Omagh	391,000	9,936,495	10,327,495
Strabane	0	2,275,116	2,275,116
Total	**38,561,582**	**420,963,767**	**459,525,349**

(ii) 2012/2013 District Council Rates (Non Domestic and Domestic)

Council	Non-Domestic Rate	Domestic Rate
Antrim	27.5346	0.3672
Ards	22.6693	0.2746
Armagh	30.0720	0.4052
Ballymena	27.2042	0.3758
Ballymoney	27.4720	0.3525
Banbridge	27.2767	0.3626
Belfast	27.0236	0.3094
Carrickfergus	27.8548	0.3810
Castlereagh	17.7629	0.2136
Coleraine	23.8497	0.3146
Cookstown	22.0894	0.2797
Craigavon	24.7682	0.3846
Derry	28.3045	0.4092
Down	25.8586	0.3423

Council	Non-Domestic Rate	Domestic Rate
Dungannon & S Tyrone	20.8151	0.2542
Fermanagh	18.1148	0.2501
Larne	25.0360	0.3694
Limavady	27.7302	0.4050
Lisburn	19.7825	0.2592
Magherafelt	20.9291	0.2641
Moyle	31.0552	0.3832
Newry & Mourne	23.8534	0.3261
Newtownabbey	26.3905	0.3379
North Down	21.1110	0.2852
Omagh	23.2063	0.3772
Strabane	24.3621	0.3580

(iii) DFP/LPS have provided the table below in respect of information sought on the penny product for each council:

Actual District Council Rates Paid for the Year Ended 31st March 2012

District	Rates Paid
Antrim	17,849,088.39
Ards	16,491,593.37
Armagh City & District	14,967,129.66
Ballymena	19,463,214.21
Ballymoney	6,096,734.96
Banbridge	11,085,291.32
Belfast	126,173,820.52
Carrickfergus	10,400,420.28
Castlereagh	13,825,055.08
Coleraine	17,554,723.26
Cookstown	7,447,212.30
Craigavon	23,687,180.50
Down	16,814,355.99
Dungannon & South Tyrone	10,579,736.45
Fermanagh	12,350,011.14
Larne	9,048,766.64
Limavady	7,617,732.46
Lisburn	25,524,123.08
Derry	33,448,567.46
Magherafelt	7,261,415.25
Moyle	4,726,258.55
Newry	23,135,177.14
Newtownabbey	23,940,156.16
North Down	21,751,034.99
Omagh	12,879,700.73

District	Rates Paid
Strabane	7,379,223.59
Totals	**501,497,723.48**

Cycling Casualties

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment what actions his Department is taking to reduce cycling casualties.
(AQW 18696/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The DOE has a statutory duty to promote road safety. One of the ways it raises awareness of road safety issues is through the Department's road safety advertising campaigns.

PSNI data shows that drivers are responsible for the majority of collisions and, as such, DOE continuously targets drivers to amend their driving behaviour, encouraging them to never ever drink and drive, to pay attention and to slow down. By changing the attitudes and behaviours of drivers, this is the most effective way of protecting all road users – cyclists, pedestrians, motorcyclists, horse riders, passengers and drivers themselves.

In October 2011 the Department launched the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign, employing radio and bus rear advertising, in order to remind drivers and cyclists alike to pay attention when sharing the road.

A radio advert targets drivers at the point of danger as they travel in the car during daytime hours when they would be expected to share the road with cyclists.

A second radio advert and bus rear advertising targets cyclists, reminding them of their vulnerability and the need to pay attention and stay safe on the roads. Resources have specifically been directed towards the 'Be Cycle Aware' campaign and it is currently on air every month as part of the Department's monthly road safety intervention radio activity throughout the year.

This activity is in line with Action Measure 124 of the Road Safety Strategy 2020 - "We will give consideration to measures that improve the safety of cyclists; including what cyclists can do to keep themselves safe and what other road users can do".

In May 2012 I launched a campaign that encourages road users to 'respect everyone's journey'. Even though cyclists are not referred to specifically, it is anticipated that the messages to drivers are such that all vulnerable road user groups, including cyclists, will benefit from the safety messages contained within them.

In September last year, I launched a campaign focusing on wider road user responsibility. This campaign urges all road users to behave appropriately and to take responsibility for their actions on the road. The opening scene of the advert addresses cyclist vulnerability by showing an injured cyclist in hospital saying "I was cycling in the bike lane. The driver said the sun was in his eyes." This campaign highlights the fact that over 95% of road deaths and serious injuries are caused by human error and carries the strapline "Kill the Excuses. It's no Accident".

In addition, a 'Cycling Skills & Cycling Safety' leaflet has been developed jointly by DOE and DRD to provide a basic guide for adult cyclists.

The leaflet provides information on the benefits of cycling, advice on basic safety requirements for a cyclist, information on the rules of the road as they apply to cyclists and advice for cyclists on safe use of the road and on interacting with other users, both vehicular and pedestrian. The leaflet is being distributed widely across Northern Ireland.

Currently all road users are provided with detailed guidance through the current edition of the Highway Code which contains rules, information and advice that helps prepare them for the demands of today's roads. Advice on how drivers should treat vulnerable road users, including cyclists, with extra care and attention is covered specifically by Rules 204 to 218 of the Code. Advice for cyclists can be found under Rules 59-82.

Furthermore, the Cycling Proficiency Scheme (CPS) is offered by the DOE Road Safety Education Officer Service (RSEOS) to every primary school in Northern Ireland. The decision to take up the offer lies with the individual schools, as does the decision on whether to include on road / off road training. Over 500 Primary Schools participate in the scheme each year with between 8,500 and 9,000 children benefiting from the scheme annually.

A review of the CPS commenced in August 2012 and is due to be completed in March 2013. The CPS continues to be offered to all primary schools in Northern Ireland while the review is in progress and schools offering CPS are fully supported by DOE RSEOS.

Planning Policy: Cycling Promotion

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the effectiveness of current planning policy in encouraging travel by bicycle.
(AQW 18699/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Cycling is promoted through various planning policies and guidance - PPS 3 'Access, Movement and Parking', PPS 7 'Quality Residential Environments' and PPS 13 'Transportation and land use'. These policies require developers to consider the needs of cyclists in bringing forward proposals for residential development and for development that provides

jobs, shopping, leisure and services. Relevant guidance is included in 'Creating Places, Achieving Quality in Residential Developments' which refers to the layout and design of cycle routes, to ensure they are safe and pleasant to use.

I am satisfied that current planning policy and guidance sets the right direction in encouraging travel by bicycle however, its effectiveness is difficult to assess as these policy instruments in themselves cannot guarantee increased cycle usage.

Planning Applications: Wind Turbines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications are currently in the planning system for single wind turbines with an output level of (i) 0kW to 50kW; (ii) 50kW to 100kW; (iii) 100kW to 200kW; and (iv) 200kW to 250kW; and how many of these applications propose the use of second hand wind turbines.
(AQW 18730/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department welcomes the contribution that renewable projects make to the reduction of carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these applications in a consistent and timely manner. As Minister I am fully supportive of renewable energy and believe firmly in the contribution that renewables make to the economy.

The information provided in planning applications for wind turbines does not always include the output level of the proposed turbine nor whether the proposed turbine will be new or second hand. It is therefore not possible from the information held on the database to provide validated statistical information in relation to this request.

Commercial Car Washes: Waste Water

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what regulations are in place to regulate the disposal of waste water from commercial car washes.
(AQW 18731/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In relation to car washes making a discharge to a storm sewer or directly to a waterway, Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Water Management Unit protects the water environment primarily through the administration, monitoring and enforcement of discharge consents, in accordance with the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999.

The Water Order empowers the Department to take enforcement action should a car wash development fail to comply with its requirements.

NIEA has worked with the Environment Agency in England and Wales, and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to produce Pollution Prevention Guideline 13 (PPG 13) 'Vehicle washing and cleaning'. PPG 13 details the statutory requirements for vehicle wash operators and highlights best practice measures to prevent such developments causing pollution in the water environment. PPG 13 can be viewed and downloaded from the following web address:

http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/PMHO0307BMDX-E-E.pdf

NIEA has also published a guidance leaflet, "Vehicle Wash Operators Guidance", which details the Agency's policy for dealing with this type of effluent, and the environmentally acceptable disposal options. This guidance can be viewed and downloaded from the following web address:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/water-home/development_management.htm

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the research paper Shale Gas: Mining The Data, published by Durham University, which recommends that fracking should not be permitted in an area where there is less than 1.2km between fresh water acquifers and the fracking zone, and the statement by Professor Peter Styles that a 500m depth between the aquifer and the fracking zone is too shallow; and whether any decision on granting permission for shale gas extraction will comply with these recommendations.
(AQW 18732/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No applications for planning or environmental permissions have yet been received by my Department. However, should such applications be received the nature of the proposal will be assessed against the existing and emerging scientific evidence base. This scientific evidence base will include the work done by Durham University, Professor Peter Styles and a range of other sources, national and international.

In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ireland, in conjunction with a Steering Committee, which includes officials from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, is taking forward a programme of research into the issue of Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction. This research will provide a local context to the growing body of research being done elsewhere.

I have always said it is essential to get a full scientific understanding before decisions are taken on hydraulic fracturing.

European Heritage Label Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what benefits the European Heritage Label brings to the local economy.
(AQW 18739/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Adoption of the label was considered by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on behalf of the UK Government in December 2008 in their consultation document 'World Heritage for The Nation, Identifying, Protecting and Promoting our World Heritage'. Having considered responses, DCMS / London decided not to participate.

The consultation considered the extent to which alternative designations 'might help us to respond to the rising costs of bidding for inscription on the World Heritage List, the difficulties of matching the heritage we most value with gaps on the global list, and the steer from the World Heritage Committee that well-represented countries should slow down or suspend nominations'. It noted that 'The UK is broadly content with the principles of the scheme, in particular that it is proposed that the scheme is to be voluntary, which will allow the UK to decide on the extent of any future participation. If we were to participate in the scheme we would need clarity on a number of issues including the costs and responsibilities of involvement; how duplication with the World Heritage List will be avoided; and the extent to which the process for nomination will be open, accountable and inclusive.'

The DOE response on 16 Feb 2009 was: 'Because of the potential of such work to act as a catalyst we favour participation in the European Heritage Label. This may allow a way of compensating for efforts which have not achieved nomination to UNESCO and of allowing further development of such a process to contribute to wider social and economic aims. We agree, however, that, to be fair, any designation should be rigorously assessed and subject to similar criteria to World Heritage Designation.'

DCMS reported as follows at the end of the consultation: 'There was no clear support for the idea of alternative designations such as the European Heritage Label or the putative National Heritage List, because resources that would have to be deployed on other such schemes would simply reduce the resources for already hard pressed World Heritage Sites, and the benefits of these alternative designations was not clear. The Government agrees with that these proposed designations do not offer a viable alternative to inscription on the World Heritage List.' That is the current position of the UK Government which has the final say on such matters in the EU. Clearly, it is not one I share or the DOE argued for.

I therefore agree with the view expressed by my predecessor, however, that the European Heritage Label does have the potential to highlight important parts of our heritage. The Walls of Derry/Londonderry are a good example of this.

Their bid to the UK Tentative list was unsuccessful in March 2011 partly because European walled cities are represented on the International list. That said, I have again been considering how to take this idea forward – namely, how to potentially get NI heritage sites listed as World Heritage sites.

European Heritage Label Programme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what correspondence his Department has had with the British Government regarding its decision not to participate in the European Heritage Label programme.
(AQW 18741/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It was the British Government that decided not to participate in the EHL programme. DOE argued for participation. I agree with that argument. I understand that the London decision was based upon the results of a public consultation on World Heritage which mentioned this as a potential alternative.

They concluded that: 'There was no clear support for the idea of alternative designations such as the European Heritage Label or the putative National Heritage List, because resources that would have to be deployed on other such schemes would simply reduce the resources for already hard pressed World Heritage Sites, and the benefits of these alternative designations was not clear. The Government agrees that these proposed designations do not offer a viable alternative to inscription on the World Heritage List.

As I have confirmed, the Department of the Environment expressed support for the Label during the consultation. Following the outcome of the consultation, officers participated in the next stage of the process of assembling an updated Tentative List of World Heritage Sites. This list was published by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in March 2011.

At that time, an argument was advanced for the Walled City to be prepared for the tentative list. It did not happen. I have recently been talking about this issue, raised it with DCMS officials and a representative of UNESCO at a meeting on 21 February 2013. This is a matter I intend to again push.

Councils: Maintenance of Services During Snowfall

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of how local councils are coping with the current snowfall.
(AQW 18768/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Most councils reported that they were unaffected to any significant degree by the recent snowfall. Of those that were, all reported that their winter preparedness plans had coped well with maintaining council functions and that it was mainly refuse collections and cleansing operations that were disrupted. Six councils implemented gritting agreements to clear pedestrian areas at the request of the Department for Regional Development.

Aerial Surveillance Equipment

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been spent by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on aerial surveillance equipment in the last five years.
(AQW 18780/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Over the last five years a total of £5,438 was spent on aerial surveillance equipment by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

This equipment comprised camcorders, BluRay recorders, televisions, batteries, memory cards and cables, and is used for the monitoring of site integrity of areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs).

Review of Public Administration: Resource Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why it was necessary to bid for a further £16.2m resource funding in respect of Local Government Reform in the January monitoring round; and what are the consequences of the refusal of the request.
(AQW 18782/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As the reform of local government is an Executive commitment, I believe that some of the costs might reasonably be expected to be funded by the Executive. It is my view that the transition phase of the local government reform programme is critical to success and the Executive should meet the upfront costs - particularly those that have no cash releasing benefits for the sector.

This will ensure that delivery of the key implementation work streams is achieved.

I have taken the opportunity at each of the 2012-13 monitoring rounds to bid for reform funding. The most recent bid, in the January Monitoring Round, was for £16.2 million and, unfortunately, was not successful.

My view was supported by the Assembly on Monday 28th January when it agreed a Motion acknowledging the significant workload and substantial costs involved in the delivery of the Executive's local government reform transition, as proposed under the Review of Public administration; believing that the Executive should provide financial support for the reform process, including for future rates convergence; and calling on the Executive to provide financial support to councils to cover the upfront costs of RPA, which yield no short-term savings, and to ensure that these costs do not result in rate increases.

I am in ongoing discussions with Executive colleagues to agree a funding package for local government reform.

Planning Bill: Economic Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how the introduction of a statutory duty to promote economic development in the planning bill would impact on planning decisions.
(AQW 18789/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Clause 2 of the Planning Bill will place a duty on the Department in formulating planning policy to do so with the objective of furthering sustainable development; promoting or improving well-being and promoting economic development. Clause 2 will also place a similar duty on anybody or person exercising any future development plan functions.

These policies and plans are key material considerations which are to be taken into account in the determination of planning applications along with all other material considerations relevant to any particular planning application.

Planning Bill: Regulatory Impact Assessment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether a regulatory impact assessment was conducted on clause 2 of the 2012 Planning Bill prior to its introduction.
(AQW 18790/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Planning Bill was subject to a regulatory impact assessment which was conducted by the Department prior to its introduction to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The regulatory impact assessment can be viewed on Planning NI website www.planningni.gov.uk.

Planning Bill: Planning Appeals

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the proposals in the 2012 Planning Bill will apply to planning appeals that are currently being assessed.
(AQW 18792/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Clauses 11, 12 and 21 of the Planning Bill bring forward reforms to planning appeals. These reforms will not apply to appeals that are currently being assessed.

It is anticipated that Clause 11 'Appeals: time limits' will take effect in relation to planning decisions issued by the Department after the commencement date of this provision.

Similarly it is anticipated that Clauses 12 and 21 'Matters which may be raised in an appeal' and the "Power of planning appeals commission to award costs" will apply to planning appeals which are received by the Planning Appeals Commission after the commencement date of this provision.

Planning Bill: Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has conducted an assessment to ascertain whether clause 10 of the 2012 Planning Bill is compatible with clause 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to a fair trial.
(AQW 18793/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has assessed whether Clause 10 of the Planning Bill is compatible with Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Department considers that clause 10 is not incompatible with that Article (see section 6(2)(c) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) and would in its view be within the legislative competence of the Assembly.

Planning Policy Statement 18

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will initiate a review of the application of PPS18, similar to that conducted on PPS21, to address the inconsistencies of application in different planning divisions.
(AQW 18855/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department welcomes the contribution that renewable projects make to the reduction of carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these types of applications in a consistent and timely manner.

In order to improve consistency in decision making I have established a Sub Group of the Planning Forum to look at measures to improve planning performance for renewables and to consider issues such as licensing requirements, resources and structures.

To date this work has resulted in the majority of renewable applications being redirected from Strategic Planning Division to the Area Office network which has increased capacity to speed up the decision making process. Prior to the redistribution of this work training was rolled out across the Area Offices to ensure consistency in decision making.

Performance within each area office is carefully monitored and a Performance Action Plan has been put in place in order to improve and manage performance. This action plan identifies a number of initiatives and allows for the monitoring and active management of performance against challenging targets.

However, applications for wind turbines differ in complexity and in quality of submission and are attracting increasing levels of objection. Consultation with a number of statutory and non-statutory bodies is required to inform the decision making process and all of these issues may prolong the processing of an application.

To improve the consultation process and to reduce the number of consultations staff have been provided with additional training to ensure consistency in carrying out consultations and reminded that they should only consult in the correct circumstances and avoid unnecessary consultations and delays.

I will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that Planning delivers in an efficient and timely manner and continue to monitor performance to ensure consistency across the area office network.

I therefore have no plans to review the operation of PPS18 at this time.

Hare Coursing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how many times Section 38 of the Wildlife and Natural Environmental Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 has been used to convict a person of illegal hare coursing.
(AQW 18858/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Section 38 of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act 2011 prohibits hare coursing events. The PSNI is responsible for enforcement of this legislation and I am informed that no prosecutions have been taken for organising or participating in a hare coursing event.

This is a matter I will raise at the next Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) meeting on 18 April 2013.

Taxis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department plans to introduce any new legislation on taxis.
(AQW 18913/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the suite of subordinate legislation to give effect to the Taxis Act 2008 approved by this house, Taxi Operator Licensing was introduced in September 2012. Building on this positive change I remain fully committed to providing a safe, fair and fit for purpose taxi industry in Northern Ireland. Other important changes which will help achieve this goal include introducing the ability for the public to hail any taxi in the street; new specifications on wheelchair accessible vehicles; and a taxi vehicle licensing regime that make it easier to tell if a taxi is legal. All of these in combination will give customers

more choice of taxis and taxi owners more opportunities for business. In addition, taxi meters will be rolled out, to the benefit of drivers and customers, and a regulated maximum fare will be introduced for all taxis.

While I am committed to introducing the changes in a timely manner, the timing of each change will be subject to the legislative scrutiny process.

I will shortly confirm the timeline to bring about these reforms. In doing so, I will work to ensure that the interests of drivers and owners and their needs are properly recognised, mindful that these are difficult economic times. I firmly believe that these changes will bring about benefits for operators, drivers and passengers alike.

Taxi Metering: Foyle Constituency

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment when taxi metering will be introduced for operators in the Foyle Constituency.
(AQW 18979/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I remain committed to reform of the taxi industry in Northern Ireland.

I am considering the timeline to bring about these reforms, including the introduction of taxi metering, which is an essential element of working towards providing a fit for purpose taxi industry. In doing so, I will work to ensure that the interests of drivers and owners and their needs are properly recognised mindful that these are difficult economic times. I firmly believe that these changes will bring about benefits for drivers and passengers alike.

Taxi Fares and Taxi Metering

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the taxi fare and taxi-meter consultation.
(AQW 18981/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I consulted on proposals to introduce new taxi fare and taximeter regulations between 17 November 2011 and 17 February 2012. The Department received written responses representing the views of 3,637 people.

These responses have been analysed and a synopsis was provided to the Environment Committee for its consideration. The synopsis is also available on the Departmental website:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recent-releases/publications-details.htm?docid=8756

Taxi fares and taxi-meters are being implemented as part of the Taxi Reform Programme. I will shortly confirm the timeline to bring about these reforms, which will include the introduction of taxi metering.

Planning Applications: Ministerial Interventions

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment to list the planning applications, apart from Article 31 applications, in which he has intervened since May 2011.
(AQW 19029/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the processing of planning applications I regularly correspond with MLAs who have written on behalf of constituents and objectors in connection with certain planning applications.

In exercising my responsibility for the direction and control of the functions of the Department consistent with statute and the Ministerial Code, I have a legitimate interest in decision making within the Department.

As Minister, it is therefore appropriate that I take a close interest in the operation and effectiveness of the planning functions of the Department. This interest can extend to scrutiny of the management of individual planning applications so that I can be satisfied that the planning functions of the Department are being undertaken effectively or to respond to any issues of concern raised by elected representatives or others.

I can confirm that I have received representations from members of all political parties in the Assembly, met delegations involving these parties and made inquiries in relation to a number of applications.

Planning Applications: Sprucefield

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment why his Department refused planning permission for the John Lewis store at Sprucefield.
(AQW 19090/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have not refused the major Article 31 planning application for a retail scheme including a Department Store, 19 Retail Units, restaurants and associated infrastructural development at Sprucefield, Lisburn for Sprucefield Centre Limited (S/2009/1045/F). However the applicant has exercised their right to withdraw the planning application rather than participate in a Public inquiry which has now been terminated.

In light of the nature of this proposal, the complex issues involved and the significant third party interest my officials had asked the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to convene a Public Inquiry to hear evidence and prepare a report on its findings.

The PAC had set a timetable for the Public Inquiry to open on the 15 April 2013 and I am disappointed that the applicant has chosen to withdraw at this late stage.

The PAC asked me to release my Department's decisions on their recommendations about elements of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015 relating to Sprucefield to facilitate the preparation of evidence for the Public inquiry. In order to provide certainty and clarity for participants in the Inquiry I issued a statement to this effect on the 11 January 2013. This publication constitutes advance notice of what the Department intends to adopt in the final plan subject to completion of all statutory procedures. The Inquiry would have allowed careful consideration of the issues including the economic impacts of the proposal and the relevant planning policy context on which the PAC could provide an Independent Inquiry Report. This would have allowed the planning application to be considered in light of a careful interrogation of all the relevant issues within the Public Inquiry Report before a final Ministerial decision was made.

In my view, the PI would have been the best course to pursue. Among other matters, it would have assessed the retail impact of the 20 stores Sprucefield application on Belfast, Bangor, Lisburn and other Greater Belfast town centres and many other locations outside Greater Belfast. The information would have been of major and multiple retail impacts, which in my view would be measured in multiple retail closure and major job losses. In my firm judgement, if I did not acknowledge this and give advice, inter alia, informed by this stark reality, I would have failed in my Ministerial duties.

Historical and Heritage Sites

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to task an organisation, other than the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, with the promotion of historical and heritage sites.
(AQW 19093/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The economic potential of our heritage sites was powerfully revealed in the report I commissioned last year: 'A Study of the Economic Value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment' which received much positive comment in the Assembly debate on Monday 21st January. I am determined that the full value to the community of our rich built heritage is realised. I am therefore convening a Summit in April of key stakeholders to examine ways in which the report's recommendations and the issues raised in the debate can be progressed, including the question of how to strengthen the performance of the Built Heritage Directorate of the Environment Agency. I will make appropriate changes to promote our rich built heritage in Northern Ireland once I have heard community views at the Summit.

The 'summit model' which I have deployed on a number of issues has worked well, moved issues forward, brought wise advice from outside government into government. I believe that likely conclusions and actions coming out of the summit will see a further strategic shift in protection and positive development of our built heritage and heritage led development.

MOT: Online Vehicle History Check

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to introduce an online system for checking vehicle MOT history, similar to that provided by Vehicle and Operator Services Agency in England, Wales and Scotland.
(AQW 19102/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware that the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) in Britain has an online vehicle MOT history check facility. This enables the user to check previous MOT test dates, odometer reading (mileage) and details of any failure items, or to check whether an MOT test certificate is authentic. The vehicle registration mark and MOT test number or V5 (registration document) number are necessary in order to access these MOT test details.

I clearly see the benefits of this system; however implementing such a system in the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) would require significant IT development. My Department is currently progressing a review of the future delivery of vehicle testing which will identify and evaluate technical options for the delivery of vehicle testing services. An online vehicle MOT test history check facility, similar to that provided by VOSA in England, Wales and Scotland, will be considered as part of this review.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 19104/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The package of functions to transfer to the new councils from central government departments is currently under review by Ministers and the Executive. Confirmation is expected soon.

Planning Enforcement Orders: Lisburn District Council Area

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how many Planning Enforcement Orders are currently outstanding in the Lisburn District Council area; and what procedures he has put in place to speed up this process.
(AQW 19117/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Enforcement Notices are provided for in Planning legislation rather than Planning Enforcement Orders and there are currently eight enforcement notices where court action is being considered by the Department or is pending within the Lisburn City Council area.

I am fully committed to swift and robust enforcement action being taken whenever it is warranted. This is a message that I have conveyed to all of my officials - including those in the Downpatrick Area Planning office who are responsible for planning enforcement in the Lisburn City Council area.

In recognition of the need to enhance the standard of service delivery in planning enforcement, additional staff resources were recently devoted to the enforcement section in Downpatrick and the office is now in the process of implementing a more focussed and proactive approach to this area of work.

The Department already has in place an Enforcement Strategy which sets out the objectives for planning enforcement, the guiding principles and priorities for enforcement action and performance targets. Officials in the Downpatrick Area Planning office are committed to complying with the strategy and the agreed targets.

I have asked senior management to closely monitor how the additional resources and a more focused and approach are impacting and improving performance in the Lisburn City Council area.

DOE: G8 Summit Additional Resources

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what additional resources his Department will receive to cover any additional costs from the G8 summit taking place in Fermanagh in June 2013 and from where the resources will be allocated.
(AQW 19150/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On 4th February I announced a £1 million funding package for environmental improvements to tackle dereliction and dilapidation in towns and cities. As part of this package, £380k has been made available to Fermanagh District Council, as hosts for the G8 summit, to tackle dereliction and decay in the area. I have identified this funding from within my Department's budget and will continue to carefully monitor budgets to ensure the best use is made of all available resources.

It may be possible to further enhance the environmental landscape in Fermanagh, ahead of the G8 summit, at the beginning of the next financial year. In which case, I will be seeking early confirmation that additional funding will be made available to my Department in the June Monitoring Round.

Environmental Damage

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what fines his Department has imposed for environmental damage, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19193/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The scale and imposition of fines imposed on environmental offenders is not a matter for my Department. The courts independently impose penalties on the evidence gathered by the Department and presented by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

Table one below summarises the total value of fines levied by the Courts for breaches of environmental regulations or pollution cases and the value of assets recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

Table One	2010	2011	2012
Court imposed fines	£114,650	£153,398	£193,075
Recovery under POCA	£200,000	£662,300	£ 50,001

See Note 1.

It should be noted that the courts have also applied custodial sentences for the most severe offences.

In addition, the Department's Planning Service, which prosecutes cases where damage has been caused to our Historic Environment, has recorded the fines imposed on Table Two – based on the last three financial years.

Table Two	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Court imposed fines	£35,400	£350	nil

Notes:

1 The figures provided do not include the small number of fines associated with Wildlife Order offences which are prosecuted via the PSNI.

2 The Member may wish to refer to the enforcement, compliance and other statistical reports available on the NIEA website where further detail is available.

Kindertransport, Millisle

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has given any consideration to the listing of the Kindertransport Farm, Millisle.
(AQW 19265/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The department has considered these buildings for listing on three separate occasions. They were first recorded in 1973 and again visited in 1998 as part of the more detailed Second Survey of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest. On each of these occasions they were considered not to meet the statutory test of Article 42 of the Planning Order (1991) i.e. they were not assessed as 'buildings of 'special architectural or historic interest'.

They were inspected and recorded again in 2009 following a Listing Query from the President of the Belfast Jewish Community. This survey has not yet been fully assessed.

I have asked the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to compete this review and I will write to you again when this has been carried out.

Kindertransport, Millisle

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment, given the disrepair of the Kindertransport Farm, Millisle, and the historical significance it has in the legacy of Holocaust survivors, whether there has been a decision made to restore the site.
(AQW 19266/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The structures on this site are not designated and are therefore currently not eligible for support from the Department of the Environment. However, this status is currently under review and, should they become listed, then eligible works of repair would attract assistance under the terms of the Listed Building Grant-Aid Scheme.

Dereliction Funding: North Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, following his Department's announcement that £1m will be spent to tackle dereliction, whether any towns in North Down will be included; and to detail the criteria by which towns have been, or will be, chosen.
(AQW 19368/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In November 2012 the Department invited all councils to make bids for dereliction funding. No proposal was received from North Down Borough Council, thus there were no towns in North Down included in the funding allocations announced.

Councils were asked to set out how their bid would provide one or all of the following

- benefits to tourism;
- a contribution to regeneration and tackling social need;
- an impact in strengthening and reinforcing existing co-operation and collaboration between NICS departments;
- a spin-off "multiplier" effect on the local economy, both in terms of jobs created, and the positive impact on the private sector and the local community.

The detailed criteria against which proposals were assessed were:

- need – an examination of the need for the work, its wider contribution to the area and any potentially complementing interface with initiatives of other Departments;
- impact – including consideration of the context and timing of any related event or projects which prompt and support the council's proposal;
- preparedness – account being taken of the council's thoroughness in planning the project and developing tenders etc. to ensure a practical ability to spend funding in line with its allocation; and
- synergies with relevance to the local community - consideration of the views and aspirations of local interest groups or residents and assessing how the work would interface with local priority needs and what longer term benefits might ensue.

It was based on a scoring matrix informed by the above criteria that monies were allocated with additional particular regard to the main Belfast – Derry road at Dungiven and the Newry and Mourne Council area give the world Fire and Police games.

As a result £2.2 million has now been allocated in an initiative that did not exist years ago. Given the popularity and impact of the scheme, I believe my argument for continued dereliction funding, including from monitoring rounds, is strong.

Dereliction Funding: Larne Borough Council

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment why Larne Borough Council's bid for Intervention money was unsuccessful; and to outline the criteria used to examine applications.
(AQW 19404/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following a call for proposals to tackle dereliction in our towns and cities, the Department received bids from 22 councils, as well as one from the Causeway Coast and Glen cluster. I have committed over £1million from my own Departmental budget to fund this work, but as my bid for additional funding in January Monitoring was unsuccessful, it was not possible to fund all bids in this financial year, and therefore the bids had to be prioritised. I hope to be in a position to offer funding to more councils, including Larne, if further finance is forthcoming. I look to members to support me in this effort.

The individual proposals were assessed and scored against the criteria set out below.

Councils were asked to set out how their bid would provide one or all of the following

- benefits to tourism;
- a contribution to regeneration and tackling social need;
- an impact in strengthening and reinforcing existing co-operation and collaboration between NICS Departments;
- a spin-off "multiplier" effect on the local economy, both in terms of jobs created, and the positive impact on the private sector and the local community.

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It was based on a scoring matrix informed by the above criteria that monies were allocated with additional particular regard to the main Belfast – Derry road at Dungiven and the Newry and Mourne Council area give the world Fire and Police games.

As a result £2.2 million has now been allocated in an initiative that did not exist years ago. Given the popularity and impact of the scheme, I believe my argument for continued dereliction funding, including from monitoring rounds, is strong.

Maze/Long Kesh Site

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the historical legal advice that he, or his predecessors, requested regarding the listed status of the Maze/Long Kesh site.
(AQW 19405/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I confirm that I have not sought legal advice previously in this matter, but also confirm that advice was sought in the previous mandate.

The concept of legal professional privilege safeguards the rights of a person or organisation, including the Department, to obtain legal advice on a confidential basis and to refuse to disclose such information in the interests of the wider administration of justice. It has been the settled view that in this context, legal advice is not disclosed.

I will however consider the matter further.

Planning Enforcement Notices: North Down Borough Council Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning enforcement orders are outstanding for the North Down Borough Council area; and how this quantity of orders will be addressed.
(AQW 19406/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Enforcement Notices are provided for in Planning legislation rather than Planning Enforcement Orders. There are currently 5 Enforcement Notices outstanding within the North Down Borough Council area; for three of these court action is being considered by the Department or is pending, one is the subject of an appeal and is within the jurisdiction of the Planning Appeals Commission and the other is in the process of being complied with.

I am fully committed to swift and robust enforcement action being taken whenever it is warranted. This is a message that I have conveyed to all of my officials - including those in the Downpatrick Area Planning office who are responsible for planning enforcement in the North Down Borough Council area.

In recognition of the need to enhance the standard of service delivery in planning enforcement, additional staff resources have recently been devoted to the enforcement section in Downpatrick and the office is now in the process of implementing a more focussed and proactive approach to this area of work.

The Department already has in place an Enforcement Strategy which sets out the objectives for planning enforcement, the guiding principles and priorities for enforcement action and performance targets. Officials in the Downpatrick Area Planning office are committed to complying with the terms of the strategy and the targets set out therein. These targets include bringing 70% of cases to a conclusion within 39 weeks (9 months) of receipt of complaint.

I am monitoring how with additional resources in place and a more focussed and proactive approach now being taken to enforcement, progress is being made towards improving performance in the North Down Borough Council area.

Dereliction Funding: Unsuccessful Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the unsuccessful applications from each local council to the Dereliction Fund.
(AQW 19409/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The councils which were not allocated funds in the phase of the dereliction funding programme announced on February 4th were -

- Antrim Borough Council
- Armagh City and District Council
- Ballymena Borough Council
- Ballymoney Borough Council
- Banbridge District Council
- Carrickfergus Borough Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council
- Coleraine Borough Council
- Cookstown District Council
- Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
- Larne Borough Council
- Limavady Borough Council
- Newry & Mourne District Council
- Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Omagh District Council
- Strabane District Council

Ards Borough Council withdrew its bid.

A proposal received from the Causeway Coast and Glen Cluster was not allocated funds.

Since that time it has been possible to fund the proposal of Limavady Borough Council and Newry & Mourne Council.

Councils were asked to set out how their bid would provide one or all of the following

- benefits to tourism;
- a contribution to regeneration and tackling social need;
- an impact in strengthening and reinforcing existing co-operation and collaboration between NICS departments;
- a spin-off “multiplier” effect on the local economy, both in terms of jobs created, and the positive impact on the private sector and the local community.

The detailed criteria against which proposals were assessed were:

- need – an examination of the need for the work, its wider contribution to the area and any potentially complementing interface with initiatives of other Departments;
- impact – including consideration of the context and timing of any related event or projects which prompt and support the council’s proposal;
- preparedness – account being taken of the council’s thoroughness in planning the project and developing tenders etc. to ensure a practical ability to spend funding in line with its allocation; and
- synergies with relevance to the local community - consideration of the views and aspirations of local interest groups or residents and assessing how the work would interface with local priority needs and what longer term benefits might ensue.

It was based on a scoring matrix informed by the above criteria that monies were allocated with additional particular regard to the main Belfast – Derry road at Dungiven and the Newry and Mourne Council area give the world Fire and Police games.

As a result £2.2 million has now been allocated in an initiative that did not exist years ago. Given the popularity and impact of the scheme, I believe my argument for continued dereliction funding, including from monitoring rounds, is strong.

Wind Farms

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment which Departments have been consulted on the effects on people living in close proximity to wind farms.
(AQW 19604/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement 18 ‘Renewable Energy’ (PPS18) sets out my Department’s policy for development that generates energy from renewable resources.

The key objective of PPS18 is to ensure that the environmental, landscape, visual and amenity impacts associates or arising from renewable energy development are adequately addressed.

To ensure there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on public safety, human health or residential amenity arising from any wind farm proposal, my officials routinely consult with the relevant Council’s Environmental Heath Department. Where specific concerns are raised, my officials will also consult with the Public Health Agency.

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxi operators have applied for a taxi operator’s licence in the last three years, broken down by council area.
(AQW 19642/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Table 1 below details the numbers of applications received by the Driver & Vehicle Agency for taxi operators' licences, from September 2012 to 13 February 2013, set out by district council area. These figures have been sourced from the Agency's own internal information systems and have not been validated as Official Statistics.

Aggregation by district council area has been made using the latest central postcode directory (Jan 2013), which is available from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Table 1

District Council	Taxi Operator Licence Applications
Antrim	97
Ards	70
Armagh	61
Ballymena	30
Ballymoney	29
Banbridge	36
Belfast	376
Carrickfergus	20
Castlereagh	42
Coleraine	118
Cookstown	52
Craigavon	96
Derry	79
Down	68
Dungannon	65
Fermanagh	69
Larne	24
Limavady	42
Lisburn	143
Magherafelt	48
Moyle	33
Newry & Mourne	93
Newtownabbey	87
North Down	45
Omagh	74
Strabane	52
All District Councils	**1,949**

Taxi Operator Licensing

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is satisfied that all taxi operators have a taxi operator's licence. **(AQW 19643/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: Since the introduction of taxi operator licensing in September 2012, a total of 1,916 applications for operator licences have been received. It is estimated that, of the currently licensed 9,500 taxi vehicles, 7,100 are covered by the applications received, and that would represent a compliance rate of 75%.

While I cannot be satisfied with that level of compliance with what is an important road safety and customer service initiative, positive progress is being made, and my Department will continue to use all of the measures available to it to promote and improve compliance.

Wind Turbines

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning applications for single wind turbines on agricultural land in (i) East Antrim; and (ii) Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19727/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As of 31 December 2012, there are 18 current planning applications for single wind turbines on agricultural land in East Antrim and a total of 639 single wind turbine applications in Northern Ireland. Please note that this information has been sourced from a live database, is subject to change following validation, and will not equate to any finalised official statistics which may be later published on the topic.

Wind Turbines

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning applications for multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in (i) East Antrim; and (ii) Northern Ireland.
(AQW 19728/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As of 31 December 2012, there are no current planning applications for multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in East Antrim and a total of 37 multiple wind turbine applications on agricultural land in Northern Ireland. Please note that this information has been sourced from a live database, is subject to change following validation, and will not equate to any finalised official statistics which may be later published on the topic.

Road Deaths

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to further reduce the number of people killed on roads.
(AQW 19733/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I welcome the further reduction in road deaths during 2012, with the recorded level of 48 being the lowest since records began in 1931. One death is, however, one too many and I have started the conversation about moving towards a vision of zero fatalities.

As Minister of the Environment, I have responsibility for co-coordinating a strategic approach to road safety. This is achieved primarily through the delivery of the Road Safety Strategy to 2020 which contains over 200 action measures aimed at further reducing the number of people killed on our roads. Responsibility for delivering individual measures falls to each relevant department and agency, working in partnership and a report on progress is published annually by the Department of the Environment.

Within the context of the Strategy, I am bringing forward a number of new road safety initiatives. To improve the position further will require bold and radical action and the introduction over the next few months of new legislation will be of particular note.

A Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill will introduce measures to tackle drink driving and introduce a system of Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL). This Bill will, along with other provisions, lower the drink drive limit and amend the learner and novice driver regimes, the latter with the objective of reducing the number of new driver casualties and of other road users killed and seriously injured by new drivers. The Bill will also cover the wearing of helmets on quadricycles on public roads. The Bill is expected to be introduced in April 2013. Drink drive and helmet-wearing provisions will begin to come into operation as soon as possible after the legislation is in place and GDL measures will begin to be seen from April/May 2014.

A further Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill is planned for 2014 which will introduce the recognition, between Northern Ireland and Ireland, of penalty points for key motoring offences and may also be used to introduce other provisions including new anti-drug driving laws.

Through its ongoing programme of awareness campaigns, my Department will continue to deliver road safety messages to all road users. A new campaign will represent a progression towards the ‘Vision Zero’ philosophy and help pave the way for the operationalisation of the new legislation. This will begin a step change in road safety but is a natural progression from our current casualty position and the core messages in DOE’s most recent campaigns: ‘Respect Everyone’s Journey’ and ‘Kill the Excuses. It’s No Accident!’.

This new campaign will aim to engage everyone in adopting, pursuing and owning a goal of zero road deaths. It will challenge us all to take personal responsibility for our own road safety and for that of other road users.

A second campaign later in the year will address seatbelt wearing. The DOE’s most recent seatbelt survey has shown that, although seatbelt wearing rates remain high at 98%, around 6% of back seat passengers are still not using a seatbelt or other suitable restraint. The Survey also shows that adults are less likely to wear a seatbelt than children. Despite moving from having the lowest rate of seatbelt wearing to the highest, when compared with England, Wales and Scotland, significant challenges remain if we are to move towards ‘Vision Zero’. It has been estimated that some four lives, thirty-nine serious injuries and one hundred and seventy-six slight injuries would have been saved each year (from 2008-2010) had a 100% wearing rate been observed. The purpose of our new campaign will be to renew the ‘No Seatbelt, No Excuse’ message to prevent a drift away from compliance, in particular amongst younger and older passengers, in some of our most vulnerable age groups.

An ongoing programme to modernise the Department's Road Safety Education Officer Service (RSEOS) will result in a fit for purpose service for our young people that is specifically designed to meet their needs. New, high quality road safety teaching resources, developed to address local issues, will help to strengthen our collaboration with teaching professionals. New resources are being developed for both primary and post-primary schools which will be made available through NI Direct and the C2K educational website or issued to schools as the year progresses. These resources, together with existing initiatives, will support the continuing delivery of road safety education by professional teaching staff in a regular structured way through the curriculum, in line with best practice. By making our resources available through C2K, we will bring them directly to teaching professionals, making it easier for them to plan a road safety lesson. A number of the new resources will also be available to youth and sporting organisations to help deliver the road safety message to the traditionally hard to reach target audience 17 to 24 year old male and those not in education, training or employment. The RSEOS will continue to work closely with schools and partners to ensure road safety education remains high on the agenda.

Establishing a sound evidence base is crucial in identifying key road safety issues and problems and deciding how to tackle them. The road safety research programme, established as part of our work on developing the Strategy and involving road safety partners, helps to identify emerging trends and assist in targeting interventions more effectively. A number of research projects have been carried out and have led to the development of 22 new action measures that were added to the Strategy in 2012. The programme, which is reviewed annually, includes ongoing statistical analysis, projects carried out by partner organisations and assignments commissioned by DOE.

MOT: Exemption of Historic Vehicles from Testing

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 12917/11-15, for an update on the development of a policy on the exemption of pre-1960 classic or historic vehicles from the MOT test.
(AQW 19774/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have answered a number of similar questions over the past months, most recently in December 2012 (AQW 17367/11-15).

The Department consulted on possible exemption of certain categories of historic vehicles from MOT testing. The responses indicated that there is broad support for exemption of pre-1960 vehicles from periodic testing.

The Environment Committee has indicated that it is content with the Department's proposed way forward following the consultation, which is to make use of the exemption in Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC concerning the periodic testing of pre-1960 vehicles. This would align with the British Government's exemption, from 18 November 2012, of pre-1960 vehicles from MOT testing.

However on 13 July 2012, the European Commission published a 'Roadworthiness Package' which, amongst other things, addresses periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles, therein making changes to the rules that apply to historic vehicles; the proposals are expected to be introduced no earlier than August 2014.

I explained in my most recent written answer on this matter that, if implemented as then drafted, these proposals would narrow the parameters within which the Department can provide for exemptions to historic vehicles, as the definition of an historical vehicle was more prescriptively described. While the Department's policy intentions remained the same; that is to make exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT regime, we had to be mindful of the changing legislative context, to ensure that any changes we make are not made redundant by incoming EC Regulations.

Following receipt of a further update on the EU negotiations regarding the roadworthiness package, one of the main amendments in which was a change to the definition of "historic vehicles" which allows vehicles that have not undergone "substantial" changes to be still classed as historic, I have instructed officials to proceed with legislative amendment to exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT test.

There are a number of issues that have needed to be resolved, including provision for a voluntary MOT test for such vehicles (for purposes including cherished plate transfer), where Northern Ireland law differs from British law and have needed careful attention. However, I believe that we are now close to resolving these issues with the Departmental Solicitors. Subject to receipt of final advice, the Department will now amend the relevant legislation to exempt pre-1960 vehicles from MOT testing and I will shortly confirm the timescale to bring about this legislative change.

Beach Cleaning

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what more his Department can do to enforce beach cleaning by local councils.
(AQW 19827/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District Councils are already under a legal duty, as respects relevant land for which they are responsible, to ensure that the land is, so far as is practicable, kept clear of litter. The legal definition of "litter" is quite wide and includes, for example, any refuse, filth, garbage or any other nauseous, offensive or unsightly waste. The law, namely the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, also provides that District Councils shall have regard to a Code of Practice on Litter in discharging the litter clearing duty. The Code provides Councils with practical guidance on the discharge of the litter clearing duty, including specific guidance on beaches.

The Code of Practice on Litter is a statutory Code which Councils must have regard to. In respect of beaches the Code makes clear that amenity beaches (including inland beaches where a substantial number of bathers or beach users congregate) should, as a minimum standard, generally be kept clear of all types of litter during the traditional bathing season from 1 May to 30 September inclusive. The Code states that it is expected that during this time of the year, beaches be subject to a frequent monitoring routine and be cleansed to as practicable a standard as possible.

The duty to clean beaches applies to items or materials originating from discharges directly to the marine environment as well as discarded items from beach users. As a guide, only litter comprising manufactured or processed items or materials that have been discarded, disposed of or abandoned, by intent or accident, should be removed. Litter should include processed food items but it does not include seaweed or twigs, which contribute to maintaining the local ecosystem. The Code also makes clear that there may be issues of practicability relating to litter removal from beaches and particular care will be needed in respect of sensitive habitats.

The law also provides that a court may act on a complaint made by any person on the ground that he or she is aggrieved by the defacement, by litter, of any relevant land of a district council. If the court is satisfied that the land in question is defaced by litter the court may make an order ("a litter abatement order") requiring the district council to clear the litter away. Failure to comply with a litter abatement order is an offence.

The legal position is therefore quite robust as, in addition to placing a legal duty on Councils to, as far as is practicable, keep land clear of litter it allows the Courts to act on a complaint by any person on the ground that he or she is aggrieved by the defacement, by litter, of any relevant land of a district council. The Department does not have any legal power to enforce cleaning of land, including beaches, by District Councils. It is only the courts that are empowered to make a litter abatement order as referred to above.

In addition to the legal position as outlined above, the Department is also moving forward in developing a Northern Ireland Marine Litter Strategy which seeks to build on the strengths of existing measures, identify proposals that will help overcome weaknesses, and maximise opportunities and minimise threats to addressing the levels of litter present in the coastal and marine environment.

The important role of Districts Councils in beach cleaning will be highlighted within the Marine Litter Strategy, which also makes reference to the inclusion of beach cleanliness in the annual Northern Ireland Litter Survey. The availability of accurate and reliable information on the levels of coastal litter will help identify those District Councils which are delivering on their commitment to keep our beaches clean.

It is also important to point out that beach cleaning is only one of a series of activities undertaken by District Councils to deliver clean beaches. Councils deliver education initiatives and awareness campaigns, such as the Coleraine Borough Council "Line Out" campaign, which raises awareness among anglers on appropriate waste disposal. Also, projects like the Coastal Guardians Project being delivered by Ards, North Down and Down District councils in partnership with the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership help to maintain beach cleanliness. This project has produced the "Coastal Guardian Pack" containing litter pick equipment, and has strengthened the capacity of local volunteers to remove litter.

These measures are aimed at effecting behavioural change to reduce reliance on the activity of beach cleaning to deliver a clean and healthy coastline.

In addition to these matters, I have convened a series of Beach Summits, the purpose and outcome of which is to address beach issues – litter, water quality, signage, information, awards (etc) all of which demonstrates a firm DOE commitment to beach management and coastal development.

Recycling

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of (i) mixed plastics; (ii) paper; (iii) newspapers and magazines; and (iv) plastic bottles that are sent to reprocessing plants can't be recycled; and what is done with these materials.
(AQW 19881/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has no regulatory reason to hold this information. Further there is currently no direct legislation relating to the quality of recyclates. This has meant a large variation of quality standards in re-processing plants and Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs).

In Britain, DEFRA has recently published proposals for a Quality Action Plan (QAP) to promote high quality recycling of dry recyclates. The QAP sets out a range of measures to be implemented in the coming years, including the reporting on recycling rates. The QAP applies to England, however it is hoped that all the Devolved Administrations will work closely together on the issue of quality to help:

- Increase public confidence and participation in recycling
- Support growth and the economy
- Improve market inefficiencies, and
- Deliver significant environmental benefits.

Alongside the QAP, DEFRA has published a Consultation Paper on draft Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) Regulations for insertion into the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) (Amendment) regulations (2013). The amendment

regulations could potentially come into force in October 2013 and MRFs over a certain size will be required to measure quality from April 2014.

In conjunction with the new regulations, DEFRA intends to publish a mandatory Code of Practice for MRFs in England and Wales. This will require MRFs to put in place robust quality management systems and take representative samples of the facility's input and output material (including the residual stream) and measure the composition of each sample by material type (i.e. paper, glass, plastic and metal). DEFRA aims to get over 90% of MRFs measuring quality.

Scotland issued similar proposals on the 21 February 2013 and Zero Waste Scotland and WRAP have proposed undertaking a joint UK-wide study of waste transfer/bulking stations to determine the average quality of each of the key recyclate streams. Both DEFRA and the Welsh Government have stated their willingness to participate in the study.

To ensure a level playing field for recyclates, provide consistency, prevent upsurges of waste movements and achieve higher quality of recyclates it will be important that the Department follows a similar and timely pathway as the rest of the UK. This should include the publication of a Quality Action Plan, MRF Recyclate Regulations and a mandatory Code of Practice.

Failing to do so will mean that there will be a lack of robust data and a continued variation of standards in local MRFs. More importantly it will exacerbate the growing trend locally to produce solid recovered fuel (SRF) and refuse derived fuel (RDF) from residual waste materials for recovery in incinerators and cement kilns.

Biodiversity

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 19046/11-15, whether the 2016 target on biodiversity commitment still stands or has been pushed back to 2020; and to outline the reasons for any change in the target date.
(AQW 19892/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The new target date reflects the renewed focus, both within the EC and the wider international community, to halt biodiversity loss by 2020. I am currently reviewing the NI Biodiversity Strategy so that it sets out specific and challenging targets for on-going action, both within DOE, other government departments and agencies, as well as business and voluntary organisations.

To that end, I see this revised Strategy as a means to increase awareness and focus attention on the importance and benefits of protecting our biodiversity, within the wider EC and international objectives. The strategy proposes to include actions from a wider sector of the community. I am committed to implementing on-going practical measures to halt biodiversity loss through safeguarding vulnerable habitats and species and whenever possible, restoring important ecosystems.

The revised strategy's targets will be regularly monitored which will assist determine if the overall objective of halting biodiversity loss will be realised during the period covered by the strategy.

Flooding: Surface Water Flooding

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) residential; and (ii) commercial properties at risk due to surface water flooding.
(AQW 19910/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Historically many cities and towns in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in UK, have been built in valleys and along river corridors and thus have resulted in increased flood risk. The Department recognises that the effects of flooding on human activity are wide ranging, impacting on the economy, social well being and the environment.

The Department consults with Rivers Agency when a development plan is being prepared to ensure that such plans do not bring forward sites or zone land that may be susceptible to flooding, unless there are exceptional circumstances, or it is considered appropriate to put mitigation measures in place.

However, the planning system cannot in itself prevent the flooding of properties but it does acknowledge the risks and uncertainties associated with climate change. The Department considers that actions to address these matters through the planning system should be based on a precautionary approach. This approach is embodied in the policies set out in Planning Policy Statement 15 'Planning and Flood Risk' to ensure that the development decisions we make today and in the future does not increase flood risk. The Review of PPS 15 will bring forward new planning policy and guidance in addressing surface water flood risk to new development.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify potential flood risk as early in the development process as possible and demonstrate how the development can be made safe through design and flood resilient construction and that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere. The Department's responsibility in respect of flooding does not affect the liability position of developers or owners.

Surface water flooding maps were published by Rivers Agency in December 2011. In the period between December 2011 and September 2012 1,273 residential and 134 commercial applications have been approved within these areas. This figure includes new and replacement as well as alterations and extensions to existing properties. The Department does not monitor the commencement or completion of building works and therefore cannot advise how many of these are actually constructed.

Planning and Local Government Group: Professional Planners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many professional planners are employed by Planning Service in each division.
(AQW 19921/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning and Local Government Group employs the following number of professional Planning Staff in each of the following locations:

Location	Number of Professional Planning Staff Employed
South Antrim Area Planning Office, Ballymena	34
Belfast Area Planning Office, Belfast (Bedford House)	44
Planning & Local Government Group Headquarters, Belfast (Millennium House)	75
Northern Area Planning Office, Coleraine	20
Southern Area Planning Office, Craigavon	54
Downpatrick Area Planning Office, Downpatrick	44
Western Area Planning Office, Enniskillen	9
Northern Area Planning Office, Londonderry	26
Western Area Planning Office, Omagh	34
Total	**340**

Dereliction Funding

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to have any further rounds of dereliction funding for town centres.
(AQW 20003/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following my announcement on 4 February 2013 of a £1 million funding package to tackle dereliction in Fermanagh, Down, Lisburn, Moyle and Belfast councils, a further £0.2 million has been identified for properties within Newry & Mourne District Council, Limavady District Council and Belfast City Council.

I see dereliction funding as a rolling programme which I am planning to maintain into the next financial year and beyond. Existing bids will be reconsidered as and when further funding becomes available and councils will have the opportunity to refresh their bids at that point if they so wish. I believe monitoring rounds provide a mechanism to roll out the scheme across the Council areas, particularly those which have not benefited to date. For a relatively small sum the dereliction fund can have a big impact. The evidence is for all to see. I hope others will back me.

DVLA Coleraine

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the future of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency office and jobs in Coleraine; and what assurances he can give that the facility and jobs will be maintained.
(AQW 20258/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing is delivered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA), under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea, which is responsible for vehicle licensing services across the United Kingdom, is nearing completion of a project to integrate the separate NI and GB computer systems in order to produce an integrated system capable of meeting the vehicle licensing needs of customers across the UK.

DVLA have proposed to use the integrated computer system to transfer all the work not done online or in Post Offices to Swansea and to terminate the agreement with DVA, mirroring developments in Britain, where the closure of all the regional and local motor tax offices is currently under way.

I am completely opposed to this proposal because of the impact on staff in DVA, who have consistently provided high standards of service; because of the impact on the local economy, especially in Coleraine, where most of the jobs are based; and because of the impact on the economy of NI as a whole. I have made it clear to Ministers in London repeatedly since becoming DOE Minister that I oppose reduction in public sector jobs, when public expenditure should be used as a stimulus to growth and when NI is so deeply hit by recession.

Since June 2011, I have been lobbying Ministers at Westminster about the threat to jobs, and encouraging local public representatives from right across the political spectrum to do likewise. I have presented a dossier of evidence to London on the reasons why jobs should be retained and how they can be.

I shall also be meeting with Stephen Hammond, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, in London on 5 March 2013 to discuss the matter further, and at that meeting I intend to again make the case for the retention of vehicle licensing services, and the associated jobs, in Northern Ireland.

I again request support for my efforts to protect jobs and resistance to the approach London has already deployed in Britain.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Aerial Photography Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cost to Land and Property Services of the use of aircraft for aerial photography and other related purposes in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19639/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The cost to Land & Property Services for the use of aircraft for aerial photography and other related purposes in each of the last five years is detailed below:

2012/2013	£155,532.36 (at 11 February 2013)
2011/2012	£131,788.08
2010/2011	£ 55,971.02
2009/2010	£ 68,693.70
2008/2009	£ 51,545.99

Care for the Elderly

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment his Department has made of the Barnett consequentials as a result of the proposed changes to inheritance tax to help fund elderly care in England.
(AQW 19658/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Recent announcements have been made proposing changes to how care for the elderly will be funded in England. My officials have spoken with HM Treasury officials about the implications of these announcements for Northern Ireland.

The detail of these changes, along with the budgetary implications, are still being analysed in HM Treasury so at this early stage the amounts are not known. However, it has been confirmed that Northern Ireland will receive Barnett Consequentials as a result of any changes to relevant Whitehall budgets.

My officials will continue to liaise with HM Treasury on this issue and I will update the Assembly of developments in due course.

Rates Arrears: North Down Borough Council

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in the North Down Borough Council area were in rates arrears in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19914/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of people in the North Down Borough Council Area who were in rates arrears in each of the last three years is not available. Information is available on the number of occupancies in the North Down Borough Council Area that had rates outstanding at the end of each rating year. An occupancy represents a liable ratepayer at a property at a given time.

The table overleaf shows the number of occupancies in the North Down Borough Council Area with rates arrears at the end of each rating year.

Number of Occupancies in the North Down Borough Council area with rates arrears at end of year

Financial Year Ending:	**Number of Occupancies**
31st March 2010	4,421
31st March 2011	3,696
31st March 2012	4,342

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the number and type of Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit reports that are currently active or have been commissioned by each Department since 2007.
(AQW 19943/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf sets out the number of reports by the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) that are currently active or which have been commissioned since the unit was established in April 2008.

The types of report produced by PEDU are mainly in respect of securing improvements in the delivery of services or reducing the costs of providing services.

It should be noted that most of the work of PEDU has been commissioned by the Executive, reflecting the requirements of all Departmental Ministers. In addition the table excludes the reports produced by PEDU in respect of the monitoring of the delivery of the Executive's Programme for Government, and the provision of advice when the monitoring reports have shown less than expected levels of progress. This work is taken forward in support of officials in OFMDFM.

Table: PEDU Reports 2008-2013

Department	Delivery Reports	Efficiency Reports
NI Executive	1	4
Agriculture and Rural Development	0	0
Culture, Arts and Leisure	1	0
Education	0	0
Employment & Learning	0	0
Enterprise, Trade & Investment	0	0
Finance and Personnel	2	2
Health, Social Services and Public Safety	0	0
Environment	1	0
Justice	0	0
Regional Development	0	1
Social Development	1	0
Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister	1	0

Vacant Properties

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether it is the responsibility of home owners to notify Land and Property Services of vacant properties in their ownership.
(AQW 20064/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no legal requirement for homeowners to notify Land & Property Services (LPS) of vacant properties in their ownership. However, there is a moral obligation on all ratepayers to pay what they rightfully owe to help maintain the public services that we all avail of and rely on. It is also in the home owners' best interests to notify LPS, as failure to provide timely ownership information can lead to a large backdated bill.

Vacant Properties

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in instances were Land and Property Services discover a vacant property, how far back can the property be rated.
(AQW 20069/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Rating of Empty Homes legislation was introduced on 1st October 2011. As a consequence, any domestic property that was vacant at 1st October 2011 will be liable for rates from that date.

Rates: Debt

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the amount of rate debt in (i) Antrim; and (ii) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, for each of the last five years.
(AQW 20070/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the amount of rate debt in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Areas in each of the last five years is not available. Information is available for the last three financial years.

The table overleaf shows the rate debt in the Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Areas at the end of each rating year. The figures for the year ended 31st March 2012 include debt arising from empty homes which became liable for rates on 1st October 2011. They are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

Rating Debt at End of Year

Financial Year Ending:	Antrim Borough Council	Newtownabbey Borough Council
31st March 2010	£4,086,811	£6,826,648
31st March 2011	£3,977,115	£6,512,287
31st March 2012	£3,853,551	£6,944,950

Mortality Statistics

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the mortality statistics for each of the last five years, broken down by cause of death.
(AQW 20124/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details the number of deaths registered by cause of death1 from 2007 to 2011. More detailed statistics are available in the 2011 Registrar General Annual Report published on the NISRA website: www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/annual_reports/2011/Table6.1_2011.xls

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision

Table: Number of Deaths Registered by Cause of Death (ICD10 Chapter), 2007 – 2011

ICD 10 Codes	Description	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
A00-Y98	All causes	14,649	14,907	14,413	14,457	14,204
A00-B99	I. Certain Infectious And Parasitic Diseases	184	183	164	174	157
C00-D48	II. Neoplasms (Cancer)	3,992	4,086	3,992	4,111	4,159
D50-D89	III. Diseases Of The Blood And Blood-Forming Organs And Certain Disorders Involving The Immune Mechanism	39	36	28	26	33
E00-E90	IV. Endocrine, Nutritional And Metabolic Diseases	299	254	319	291	238
F00-F99	V. Mental And Behavioural Disorders1	514	575	525	569	894
G00-H95	VI-VIII. Diseases Of The Nervous System And The Sense Organs	588	600	618	569	672
I00-I99	IX. Diseases Of The Circulatory System1	4,838	4,752	4,485	4,476	3,951
J00-J99	X. Diseases Of The Respiratory System	1,992	2,096	2,017	1,886	1,923
K00-K93	XI. Diseases Of The Digestive System	711	682	686	715	657
L00-L99	XII. Diseases Of The Skin And Subcutaneous Tissue	26	24	38	32	23
M00-M99	XIII. Diseases Of The Musculoskeletal System And Connective Tissue	76	85	84	100	103
N00-N99	XIV. Diseases Of The Genitourinary System	381	400	367	369	331
O00-O99	XV. Pregnancy, Childbirth And The Puerperium	-	-	5	2	4
P00-P96	XVI. Certain Conditions Originating In The Perinatal Period	50	67	60	77	57
Q00-Q99	XVII. Congenital Malformations Deformations And Chromosomal Abnormalities	61	74	82	85	72
R00-R99	XVIII. Systems, Signs And Abnormal Clinical And Laboratory Findings, N.E.C.	125	139	138	135	145
V01-Y98	XIX. External Causes Of Mortality	773	854	805	840	785

1 Due to improvements in automatic coding, deaths previously jointly coded as I63.9 ‘Cerebral infarction, unspecified’ and F03.0 ‘Unspecified dementia’ are now coded to F01.1 ‘Multi-infarct dementia’. This has been implemented in Northern Ireland for 2011 Registrations onwards. This change in coding has had an impact on Cause of Death figures by decreasing the overall number of deaths from ‘Diseases Of The Circulatory System’ and increasing the number of deaths from ‘Mental And Behavioural Disorders’

DHSSPS: Budget

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the increased budget allocation to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety during 2012/13.
(AQO 3485/11-15)

Mr Wilson: During 2012-13, the DEL budget allocation to DHSSPS increased by £62.597m comprising a net increase of £53.885m in Resource provision and £8.712m in Capital provision.

These changes reflect the net impact of allocations by the Executive, technical transfers between departments and internal reclassifications initiated by DHSSPS in Monitoring Rounds; allocations in relation to the Executive’s Invest to Save Scheme, the Childcare Strategy, Delivering Social Change initiatives and reduced requirements in respect of depreciation and delayed capital projects.

Efficiency Delivery Programme: NIAO Report

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report on the Review of the Efficiency Delivery Programme.
(AQO 3486/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I welcome the report by the Audit Office on the Efficiency Delivery Programme. The report contains a number of recommendations for departments in relation to the assessment and monitoring of any efficiency programme and anything that encourages transparency and accountability is to be welcomed. The report also calls for greater challenge and scrutiny of how departments deliver efficiencies. I am firmly of the view that this is a role that Assembly Committees should undertake – holding departments to account for delivery of efficiencies. The Audit Office report also contains a number of recommendations for my department and my officials are due to report on these to the Finance Committee next month.

Income Tax Revenue

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has requested an accurate figure of income tax revenue from the Treasury rather than estimates.
(AQO 3494/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have not requested an actual income tax revenue figure for Northern Ireland as regional tax data is not routinely published by HM Treasury or HMRC. This would not be a straightforward exercise and I do not have any expectation that it is one that the Treasury would be willing to undertake at this time. That is why it has been necessary to estimate Northern Ireland’s share of the various tax revenues that are collected nationally in the UK. Scotland have had to do likewise in producing their Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland report.

DFP: Contracts

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why his Department predominantly uses multi-trade term contracts which may discriminate against small and medium-sized enterprises.
(AQO 3495/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Most construction contracts in both the private and public sectors are let as multi trade contracts. This ensures that the responsibility for the management of individual subcontractors rests with a main contractor, who is best placed to coordinate the different trades. This approach is much more cost effective for public bodies as it has lower staffing and operating costs, compared to placing individual trade contracts.

Multi-trade procurements are particularly relevant in the use of frameworks to deliver maintenance and minor works. Many public bodies simply do not have sufficient technical and professional staff to be able to procure and manage the number of individual contracts that changing from multi-trade contracts would require.

Rates Arrears

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the current levels of rates arrears and recovery for commercial and domestic properties.
(AQO 3496/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At the end of the 2011/12 financial year there was an outstanding debt of £70.7 million associated with domestic properties (including £7.9 million debt associated with vacant domestic properties) and an outstanding debt of £90.8 million debt associated with non-domestic properties. These figures do not take into account almost £609,000 that had been receipted at year-end but without the required level of detail provided to allow the payment to be allocated to an account.

Land & Property Services provides ratepayers with a number of opportunities to pay their rate bills, or to put in place a payment arrangement. If payment or a payment arrangement is not forthcoming, Land & Property Services will use the court process to attempt to collect the debt or to enforce the judgement of the Court against the rate payer.

Land and Property Services

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the work of Land and Property Services.
(AQO 3497/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The work of Land & Property Services (LPS) plays a key role in supporting the delivery of the NI Executive's Programme for Government for Northern Ireland 2011-15 in many areas.

LPS is currently making good progress against most of the corporate targets. The position as at 31st January 2013 against LPS three Key Targets is as follows:

(i) LPS has collected £1057.2 million in rates against the target "To collect £1.1 billion (cash value of rates)and transfer to Paymaster General's Account during 2012-13" ;

(ii) LPS is focusing on extensive recovery action and is making steady progress to reduce the level of rating debt against the target "Value of the end of year rating debt to be £145 million excluding rating of empty homes"; and

(iii) INSPIRE* Annex I and II download services implemented at 31 December 2012.

* The aim of Infrastructure for Spatial Information In the European Community (INSPIRE) is to establish a data sharing portal which meets the demands of the EU Directive for Northern Ireland for discovering, viewing and downloading spatial data.

During the next few years, LPS will face additional challenges because of the review of public administration (RPA), Non-Domestic Revaluation and even Welfare Reform. I am committed to ensuring that LPS, as a key part of my Department, has the required resources to manage these additional challenges.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 methodology, originally designed to produce the Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland, is intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items.
(AQO 3498/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The methodology and consequently the report is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Corporation Tax

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any recent discussions that he has had with the British Prime Minister on the devolution of Corporation Tax.
(AQO 3499/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have not had any discussions with the Prime Minister recently in respect of corporation tax.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister wrote to the Prime Minister on 29 November 2012 to request a meeting to discuss the findings of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland (NI) economy, which had considered the scope to devolve responsibility for corporation tax to the NI Executive.

The Prime Minister replied on 9 January 2013 agreeing to the request, with a date for the meeting now arranged for the end of March.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

DHSSPS: Special Adviser

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether his Special Adviser has made any declarations of interest, pursuant to the obligation on civil servants; (ii) how such declarations are recorded; and (iii) whether they are open to public inspection.
(AQW 19292/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):

(i) My Special Adviser has not made any declarations of interest;

(ii) My Special Adviser is required to declare any potential conflict of interest to the Establishment Officer in Departmental HR in accordance with the conduct provisions in Section 6.01 of the Employee Relations part of the NICS HR Handbook. Records of declarations of potential conflict of interest are held by Departmental HR in a Register of Interest and on the individual's Personal File;

(iii) The Register of Interest is not open to public inspection, with the exception of declarations made by Departmental Board members, which are published in the Department's Annual Resource Accounts.

Rare Disease Plan

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the rare disease plan will be implemented.
(AQW 19776/11-15)

Mr Poots: In line with the 2009 European Council Recommendation on Rare Diseases, the final UK plan representing all four Countries is expected to be published by the end of 2013. When the Plan is published it will be for each devolved administration to decide how to implement it within their respective jurisdictions and my Department will set out its proposals on how it should be implemented in Northern Ireland.

Ambulances

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the arrangements for the deployment of ambulances from Altnagelvin Area Hospital to hospitals in each of the other Health and Social Care Trust areas, outside high demand times.
(AQW 19782/11-15)

Mr Poots: The deployment and dispatch of ambulances are entirely operational matters for which the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) is responsible. It should be noted that NIAS is a regional service which dynamically deploys its emergency response resources both within and outside times of high demand. This means that the nearest available ambulance will respond to any emergency call. Therefore it is quite possible that resources based outside its Western Division area will respond to calls within the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust. Similarly, ambulance vehicles normally based outside the Western HSC Trust area will respond to calls within that area if required.

ENT: Treatment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of new patients requiring an ENT outpatient appointment or treatment in each of the last four years, in each of the Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) whether demand for ENT treatment has risen over the last four years; (iii) why demand for ENT treatment has risen; and (iv) whether his Department intends to employ more doctors to undertake ENT outpatient appointments or treatment to ensure that waiting lists for ENT treatment are reduced, and to provide further details on this recruitment.
(AQW 19846/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of new patients who were waiting for a first Consultant-led outpatient appointment in the ENT Specialty has risen steadily over the last four years. Details in respect of each Health and Social Care Trust are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

	Quarter Ending			
HSC Trust	**31/03/09**	**31/03/10**	**31/03/11**	**31/03/12**
Belfast	1,672	2,243	2,143	3,892
Northern	1,560	1,682	2,567	2,667
South Eastern	1,263	1,950	1,455	1,737
Southern	1,586	1,832	1,888	1,984
Western	1,071	1,457	1,472	1,712
N. Ireland	**7,152**	**9,164**	**9,525**	**11,992**

Inpatient admission in the ENT specialty has also steadily risen over the last few years, as detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

	Quarter Ending			
HSC Trust	**31/03/09**	**31/03/10**	**31/03/11**	**31/03/12**
Belfast	972	966	1,605	1,660

HSC Trust	Quarter Ending			
	31/03/09	31/03/10	31/03/11	31/03/12
Northern	518	474	433	461
South Eastern	236	132	230	316
Southern	671	454	486	599
Western	473	470	511	729
N. Ireland	**2,870**	**2,496**	**3,265**	**3,765**

The reasons for the increase in demand for elective care services, including ENT treatment, can include demographic changes, changes in primary care, greater public awareness and reduced waiting times.

I am advised that the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board has recently allocated an additional £514,000 to meet demand and reduce waiting times across both assessments and treatments in the ENT specialty.

The Southern HSC Trust is currently recruiting an ENT consultant, and the Northern Trust is looking at increasing clinical capacity within its ENT service. The Belfast Trust has a vacancy caused by a consultant's retirement which has been advertised as a locum post. The Western Trust and South Eastern Trusts have no plans to recruit additional doctors however additional Outpatient Clinics and Theatre Lists will be undertaken by the South Eastern Trust's ENT Consultants between now and the end of March 2013 to ensure ENT waiting lists are reduced.

Holywood Arches Health Centre

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the care in the community centre service in Holywood Arches Health Centre was stopped; (ii) which management body in his Department made this decision; and (iii) how much it would cost to reinstate the scheme.
(AQW 19847/11-15)

Mr Poots: The service at the Holywood Arches Health Centre was approved by the HSCB Primary Care Partnership Project Board as a pathfinder pilot to evaluate the potential for a GP-delivered service outside hospital.

It was commissioned by the Belfast Local Commissioning Group (LCG) in September 2011 to run as a pilot until June 2012; the LCG subsequently decided to extend it to December 2012.

The pilot will now be evaluated by the HSCB with the aim to test the potential of the scheme to be extended regionally. The cost of the pilot scheme was £10,250 per month.

Hospital Appointments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategies are being pursued to reduce the number of missed hospital appointments.
(AQW 19869/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) that HSC Trusts have implemented or are implementing a number of measures to reduce the number of missed hospital appointments. These include:

- Applying flexible partial booking systems for most outpatient appointments and some review appointments, as opposed to fixed appointment booking systems. Partial booking allows patients to choose an appointment time of their choice no more than six weeks in advance of attendance;
- By the end of 2013 all Trusts should have some form of text messaging or voice messaging service in place to remind patients of their appointment date; and,
- Trusts now require hospital consultants, under the terms of the Integrated Elective Access Protocol (IEAP) to provide at least six weeks notice of annual leave to allow outpatient and review clinics to be planned with some degree of assurance.

The number of patients who "Did Not Attend" their appointment and the number of cancelled appointments by hospitals has reduced in recent years and I welcome this improvement.

Family Fund

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current level of funding that his Department provides to the Family Fund; and what funding is planned for the next financial year.
(AQW 19924/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Family Fund has already received its total funding allocation of £1.57m from my Department for this financial year. Funding allocations for the next financial year in respect of voluntary organisations, including the Family Fund, are currently being assessed in line with my Department's priorities.

Antrim Area Hospital: Laboratory Assistants

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why some laboratory assistants at Antrim Area Hospital are still being paid within Band 2 while other assistants within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust are on Band 3 or higher, given that they were advised that their Band 3 pay had been approved in March 2012; and (ii) when they will receive the pay rise and back pay.
(AQW 19931/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been advised that the process for considering applications submitted by staff under the Agenda for Change (AfC) Clustering Agreement has not yet been completed.

Laboratory Assistants in Antrim Area Hospital have not been advised of the outcome of any applications which have been submitted. The Laboratory Assistants who have submitted applications will be advised of the outcome when the process in respect of their application is complete.

Independent Living Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how he will maintain the Independent Living Fund after 2015.
(AQW 19953/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is now doing all it can to help ensure that those disabled people in Northern Ireland who are most in need of care and support are not disadvantaged by the decision of the Department for Work and Pensions to close the Independent Living Fund (ILF) with effect from April 2015.

The ILF monies will not be lost to NI and my officials will develop transitional arrangements for current recipients of the ILF. They will also work closely with the other devolved administrations to help develop alternative longer-term arrangements for the future provision of the care and support previously funded by the ILF. Draft proposals will be submitted to the NI Executive for consideration in due course.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Statutory Continuing Healthcare

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all Health and Social Care Trusts commission statutory continuing care; and how the Trusts that do not commission this care are meeting the needs of patients who have been assessed, using the Single Assessment Tool, as requiring continuing care.
(AQW 19956/11-15)

Mr Poots: Departmental Circular ECCU 1/2010 ‘Care Management, Provision of Services and Charging Guidance’ provides Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts guidance on the provision of continuing healthcare in NI. Within our integrated health and social care system, HSC Trusts are responsible for carrying out assessment of needs for individuals with continuing healthcare needs. All HSC Trusts have confirmed that they comply with the aforementioned Departmental guidance.

Transforming Your Care: Statutory Residential Homes Top-up Fees

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that residents of statutory residential, homes which are facing closure, will not be subject to top-up fees in their new place of residence and that good practice will be followed for those transferring to other accommodation.
(AQW 19957/11-15)

Mr Poots: The TYC proposals around statutory residential care describe a phased closure of a number of older people’s statutory residential homes in a managed way over a 3-5 year period. Part of the TYC vision is that in future people will be offered alternatives to such formal care via ‘enhanced’ domiciliary care packages in their own homes or by the provision of accommodation in ‘supported living’ environments.

Should a statutory residential home be identified as suitable for closure and residents are required to transfer other accommodation, it is current Trust practice to always seek care placements at the regional tariff rate in the first instance. Where a suitable residential placement at regional rate is not available, there is an existing policy in place whereby the Trust will fund any ‘top up’ charge without the requirement for an individual or family member to fund this cost differential. This approach will continue as the planned changes to statutory residential provision are rolled out.

It is anticipated that numbers of residents transferring to other accommodation will be kept to a minimum by ceasing new admissions to homes which are identified for closure. However, it is inevitable that some residents may have to transfer and when this occurs they will be fully supported by the trust to find a suitable alternative. I can assure you that the health and wellbeing of the current residents will be central in this change process.

Food Advertising

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to a ban on the advertising of foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt before 9pm.
(AQW 20008/11-15)

Mr Poots: Broadcast advertising is a reserved matter, and is therefore not within the remit of my Department. However, the Obesity Prevention Framework, known as A Fitter Future for All, recognises the impact of advertising food high in fat, salt, and sugar, particularly on our children and young people.

I have therefore raised this issue with my counterparts in the UK Government, calling for greater restrictions on advertising these products, including potentially introducing a 9pm watershed or making it a requirement that companies that want to continue to advertise such products have to provide funding to support the advertising of our public health messages.

Eating Establishments: Displaying Calorie Information on Menus

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efforts his Department has made to encourage eating establishments to display calorie counts on their menus.
(AQW 20009/11-15)

Mr Poots: I launched the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Caloriewise pilot scheme on 24 April 2012. This pilot aimed to encourage caterers to display calorie information on their menus. A number of catering companies participated in the pilot including Sodexo, Mount Charles, the Streat, Botanic Inns, and Aramark. In addition, three Health and Social Care Trusts are displaying calories in staff and visitor cafes and restaurants.

This pilot finished in October 2012 however the companies involved continue to display Calorie information whilst the evaluation of the pilot is underway. A detailed evaluation report of the scheme is due to be published in July 2013, and following this consideration will be given to rolling the scheme out across Northern Ireland.

Family Fund

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact of recent reductions in funding for the Family Fund on (i) families who will now be unable to receive funding; and (ii) the Health and Social Care Trusts and other associated services.
(AQW 20027/11-15)

Mr Poots: No such assessment has been undertaken. I regret that it was necessary to reduce my Department's support for the Fund in 2011/12 but in a very challenging financial climate, I must ensure that the funding I have available is maximised to meet the needs of as many people as possible who rely on health, social care and public safety services.

My Department's contribution of £1.57million during this financial year has enabled the Family Fund to help almost 2,700 families with disabled children in Northern Ireland.

Family Fund

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the meetings that he has held with representatives of the Family Fund on securing funding for 2013/14.
(AQW 20028/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not met personally with representatives of the Family Fund to discuss funding for 2013/14. However, my officials met with their representatives on 31 January 2013 when a range of issues, including funding provision for 2013/14, were discussed.

Sports Therapists

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration has been given to the state registration of sports therapists, in light of the recommendation by the Health and Care Professions Council.
(AQW 20038/11-15)

Mr Poots: The recommendation by the Health and Care Professions Council for the regulation of sports therapists has to be reconsidered in light of the coalition government's priority for reducing regulation.

Currently, Sports Therapists have the option to voluntarily register with the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CHNC) which is sponsored by the Department of Health.

My Department will continue to work with the other UK countries in considering any future arrangements for this particular group.

Organ Donation Waiting List

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were on the organ donation waiting list in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20045/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is held by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), which is the organ donation organisation for the UK. The latest published information can be found on the NHSBT website at:

http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/statistics/downloads/northern_ireland.pdf

Organ Transplants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many organ transplants have been carried out in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20049/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is held by NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT), which is the organ donation organisation for the UK. The latest published information can be found on the NHSBT website at:

http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/statistics/downloads/northern_ireland.pdf

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Through-floor Lifts

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which companies are employed by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to service through-floor lifts.
(AQW 20074/11-15)

Mr Poots: We have been advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that Pollock Lifts currently install lifts within the Trust. They are responsible for the repair and maintenance of all lifts during the one year warranty period from the date of installation.

Following cessation of the warranty period responsibility then transfers to the Trust's Repair/Maintenance Contractor who is currently Olympic Lifts.

All contracts are procured through PALS.

Tri-nations Tender: Surgical Gloves

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (a) company name; (b) lot; and (c) unit price of the tenders awarded for surgical gloves and surgical under gloves under the tri-nations tender (NP569/11).
(AQW 20098/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is shown in the table below. It should be noted that, until it is known which gloves in each lot will be used by each Health & Social Care Trust, the exact prices payable cannot be determined.

Lot	Supplier	Unit Price £
1 General Surgical Gloves Latex	Ansell	0.34
	Ansell	0.36
	Ansell	0.45
	Ph Medisavers	0.30
	Ph Medisavers	0.44
	Ph Medisavers	0.38
	Medline	0.30
	Medline	0.45
	Medline	0.40
	Medline	0.52

Lot	Supplier	Unit Price £
2 General Surgical Gloves Latex-Free	Ansell	0.75
	Medline	1.00
	Medline	1.00 (Sensicare glove)
	Medline	0.747
	Medline	0.83
	Medline	0.91
	Ph Medisavers	0.95
	Ph Medisavers	1.00
	Ph Medisavers	0.96
	Ph Medisavers	0.90
	Molnlycke	0.98
	Molnlycke	0.98 (Ultratouch M Glove)
	Molnlycke	1.28
	Sempermed	0.99
	Sempermed	1.49
	Sempermed	1.49 (Syntegra Green Underglove)
3 Enhanced Grip Latex	Medline	0.45
	Medline	0.45 (Triumph LT Glove)
	Sempermed	0.54
	Medicare	0.52
4 Enhanced Grip Latex-Free	Medline	0.80
	Molnlycke	1.25

Family Fund

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to help the Family Fund meet the needs of low income families with children with a severe disability or illness.
(AQW 20218/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the current financial year, my Department provided £1.57million to the Family Fund to support approximately 2,700 families with disabled children in Northern Ireland. The Fund was able to provide the families with a range of help with items such as beds, bedding, clothing, computers, games consoles, sensory equipment and specialist toys, day trips, family breaks, washing machines and other white goods. My Department will continue to support the family fund in the forthcoming financial year.

DHSSPS: Transport Services

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efforts his Department, in conjunction with other Departments, has made to co-ordinate transport services.
(AQO 3501/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials from my Department met with Department of Regional Development (DRD) officials in early 2012 to explore the potential for a collaborative approach between Northern Ireland's health and public transport sectors. Following this, DRD developed a proposal to run a pilot project in the Dungannon and Cookstown District Council areas to assess the benefits of a more joined up approach to the design and delivery of publicly funded passenger transport services. My Department is a member of the Project Board along with representatives from the Departments of Regional Development, Education and Agriculture and Rural Development

Older People: Social Care

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to reform the system of social care for the elderly.
(AQO 3500/11-15)

Mr Poots: Every day thousands of vulnerable people in our communities – and not just older people – are supported by the full range of social care services. Members will be aware, however, that social care is coming under increasing pressure because of demographic change, increasing expectations and a challenging financial climate.

That is why I have committed to a three stage process of reform in Northern Ireland. The first stage commenced on 17th September 2012 when I launched 'Who Cares? The Future of Adult Care and Support in NI' for a six month period of public consultation.

Following consideration of the responses to this ongoing consultation my department will prepare a further paper outlining a number of potential reforms. This will then be subject to further consultation before final reforms are identified and agreed.

Organ Donation

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the public consultation on new proposals around organ donation will be launched.
(AQO 3507/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 8 and 10 together, as they relate to organ donation.

I am aiming to announce in the near future the process and timetable for a consultation exercise which will seek the views of the general public, transplant related charities, donor families, those on the waiting list and the health service community on proposals to increase organ donation in Northern Ireland. This will include exploring public attitudes towards an opt-out system. In all of this my clear aim is to send out a strong message for people to sign on to the organ donor register.

ENT: Waiting Lists

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have had to be referred for private ENT procedures because of the long health service waiting lists.
(AQO 3508/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest figures available for the period from 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2012 show that 2289 outpatients and 318 inpatients and daycases were referred to the Independent Sector. It is unacceptable that anyone has to wait overly long for treatment and I look to the Health and Social Care Board and Trusts to achieve the waiting time targets that I have set for all specialties including ENT. The Board has recently allocated an additional £514,000 to meet demand and reduce waiting times across both assessments and treatments within the ENT specialty.

Organ Donation

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the timescale for the consultation aimed at maximising organ donation rates.
(AQO 3509/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 8 and 10 together, as they relate to organ donation.

I am aiming to announce in the near future the process and timetable for a consultation exercise which will seek the views of the general public, transplant related charities, donor families, those on the waiting list and the health service community on proposals to increase organ donation in Northern Ireland. This will include exploring public attitudes towards an opt-out system. In all of this my clear aim is to send out a strong message for people to sign on to the organ donor register.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery public consultation, including when he intends to make a decision.
(AQO 3510/11-15)

Mr Poots: You will be aware that I asked the Health and Social Care Board, in association with the Public Health Agency, to establish a Working Group to consider the future requirements for delivering a paediatric congenital cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology service for Northern Ireland. Following public consultation on a draft document which included a commissioning specification, criteria, and options for the future delivery of this service, the Working Group submitted a post-consultation document, to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) for consideration.

This document is in the form of a framework which includes amended service specification, options and scoring, agreed by the Working Group, following consideration of representations received during the public consultation.

The Board approved this document on 14 February 2013 and has submitted it to my Department for consideration. I am aiming to reach a decision on whether to approve the document as soon as possible.

If I approve the framework it will then be applied by the HSCB to each of the options outlined in it, with the aim of identifying a preferred way forward for the provision of services for children with heart disease in Northern Ireland. The preferred way forward will then be submitted to me for consideration and I am aiming to make my final decision on the future arrangements for this service within the coming months.

The post consultation document is available on the HSC Board website.

Accident and Emergency Departments: Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the closure of the Accident and Emergency unit at Belfast City Hospital has been a contributory factor in increasing waiting times across the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQO 3511/11-15)

Mr Poots: The temporary closure of the Accident and Emergency unit at the Belfast City Hospital has not had any significant impact on waiting times across the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. In fact, the Belfast Trust has made particularly good progress in reducing 12 hour waiting times for patients. In January 2012, 416 people waited longer than 12 hours in Belfast Trust emergency departments; compared with January 2013 when no one waited longer than 12 hours in any of the Belfast Trust hospitals.

While I welcome this improvement there is no room for complacency in further reducing patient waiting times and I continue to look to the Health and Social Care Board to work with all Trusts to ensure that a focus remains on improving the performance of our emergency departments.

On 5 February 2013 I launched the consultation document on proposals for the future configuration of emergency department services in Belfast. I encourage everyone to respond to the consultation giving their views on the proposals to the Health and Social Care Board.

Transforming Your Care: Stakeholders

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on plans for engagement with key stakeholders during the implementation of Transforming Your Care.
(AQO 3512/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has undertaken an extensive range of engagement activities in the development of the Transforming Your Care Review in 2011, during the development of local Population Plans in 2012 and throughout the recent public consultation for Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action which completed on 15th January 2013.

The HSCB is currently analysing all of the consultation responses for Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action and will be reporting to my Department shortly on the findings of this consultation. I will consider the HSCB's consultation report and then make an announcement on the way forward.

During the implementation phase of Transforming Your Care, a programme of engagement with staff, service users, the general public and key stakeholder organisations will be undertaken. Vision to Action proposed that implementation would take place over a 3-5 year period and engagement would be ongoing throughout this time. Where any significant specific local changes are to take place, a further formal period of public consultation would take place with specific involvement of local stakeholders.

Tobacco Products

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department still supports a move to standardised packaging of tobacco products.
(AQO 3513/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am supportive of any measure which would lead to a reduction in smoking prevalence and, in particular, a reduction in the uptake of smoking by young people. That is why I agreed in March last year to the inclusion of Northern Ireland in a UK-wide consultation exercise on standardised packaging for tobacco products. The consultation ended in August 2012 and the Department of Health in London is due to issue a summary of the consultation responses in the near future.

Only when I have received and fully considered the consultation summary report and a separate analysis of local responses, will I make a decision as to whether standardised packaging should be considered for introduction in Northern Ireland.

Department of Justice

Northern Ireland Policing Board: Percentage Disablement Reviews

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice on what basis does the Northern Ireland Policing Board initiate Percentage Disablement Reviews for retired Police Officers aged over 65; and what guidance pertains to such reviews.
(AQW 17851/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Policing Board is legally obliged, where an injury pension is payable, under the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) Regulations 2006 to periodically review the degree of the former officer's disablement.

The Northern Ireland Office issued guidance relating to the calculation of the percentage disablement award for over 65s in their circular 6/2007. Following the "Simpson" judgment this guidance was withdrawn by the Department of Justice and on 20 June 2012 new guidance issued. Copies of the letters can be obtained from the Department's website www.dojni.gov.uk under Medical appeals.

The administration of the Injury Benefit Scheme is the responsibility of the Policing Board. As I am committed to respecting the independence of its role you may wish to direct any further queries to the Chief Executive of the Policing Board.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18621/11-15 and in light of legislative requirements and government policies, why the Northern Ireland Prison Service is unable to comply by processing and providing such information in a way so as to facilitate access in an accurate and timely manner.
(AQW 19601/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no legislative basis or policy which requires the information requested to be held centrally. It is recorded on individual staff files.

Alastair Hetherington

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for a breakdown of the costs of the prosecution and subsequent acquittal of Mr Alastair Hetherington at Belfast Crown Court on Wednesday 6 February 2013.
(AQW 19618/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated costs to date of the prosecution and subsequent acquittal of Mr Alastair Hetherington at Belfast Crown Court are detailed in the table below:

Cost Type	**Estimated Cost £**
PSNI[1]	Not Available
PPS Prosecution[2]	1,366.73
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)[3]	13,001.50
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	4,930.26
Jury Costs	1,181.32
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	675.00
Total	**21,154.81**

1 The PSNI have not provided costs as all costs associated with attendance at court was pre-detailed duty and no additional costs were incurred.

2 This figure represents the PPS costs paid to date, however final costs for all fees for counsel and witness expenses have not yet been billed.

3 This represents an estimated cost from the Legal Services Commission for Crown Court fees. No claims have been received to date in this case.

Death in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, to detail (i) the number of outstanding recommendations in respect of HMP Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood that have not been implemented arising from death in custody investigations or other external reviews; (ii) the authors of such reports/recommendations with the dates of publication; and (iii) why senior Northern Ireland Prison Service management has not yet implemented the recommendations.
(AQW 19620/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The number of outstanding recommendations in respect of each of the establishments is contained in the table below:

	Total Number of NIPS Recommendations	**Total Number of Outstanding Recommendations**
Hydebank Wood	193	126

	Total Number of NIPS Recommendations	Total Number of Outstanding Recommendations
Maghaberry Prison	248	143
Magilligan Prison	174	45

(ii) A list of the reports specific to each unit is provided at Annex A.

(iii) The recommendations contained in these reports serve as an important driver for change and the main themes have, where appropriate, been incorporated into the wider Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness (SEE) and Prison Reform programmes. The scale of the change programme currently underway is considerable and, as I have said on a number of occasions, it is clear that lasting and effective reform will take time.

Annex A

Report	Date of Report
The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority report on the Young Offenders Centre	7 October 2011
The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons and the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority report on Hydebank Wood women's prison	7 October 2011
The Prisoner Ombudsman report into the death in custody of Mr Allyn James Baxter	3 June 2011
The Prisoner Ombudsman report into the death in custody of Mr Samuel Carson	8 November 2012
The Prisoner Ombudsman report into the death in custody of Mrs Frances McKeown	22 November 2012
The Independent Monitoring Board report on Hydebank Wood 2010/11	16 September 2011
The Independent Monitoring Board report on Hydebank Wood 2011/12	14 December 2012
Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland – Announced Inspection of Maghaberry Prison	17 December 2012
Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland – Follow up Inspection of NIPS Mistaken Prisoners releases	3 April 2012
Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland – Life Sentence Prisoners	2009
Prisoner Ombudsman Death in Custody Prisoner B	15 November 2010
Prisoner Ombudsman Death in Custody Colin Bell	9 January 2009
Prisoner Ombudsman Death in Custody Aaron Hogg	28 June 2012
Prisoner Ombudsman Death in Custody Mark Maginnis	21 March 2012
Prisoner Ombudsman Death in Custody Patrick Duffy	13 June 2012
Independent Monitoring Board Maghaberry Prison	2011/2012
Investigation Report into Separated Accommodation in Roe House	2012
Interception of Communication Commissioners Office – Maghaberry Prison Inspection	18 June 2012
Regulation, Quality, Improvement Authority – Roe House Maghaberry	19 August 2011
CJINI Magilligan Inspection	September 2010
Death in Custody – RBG – Prisoner Ombudsman	April 2010
Death in Custody RD Prisoner Ombudsman	October 2007
IMB Magilligan Prison	2012
Interception of Communications Commissioners Office (IOCCO) Magilligan Prison Inspection	July 2012

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Counselling Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18697/11-15 and AQW 17826/11-15; (i) whether he wishes to revise his answer in terms of the non-inclusion of transport costs given that the answer to AQW 16983/11-15 stated that the

cost of the clinical sessions involving the prisoner's wife as well as her travel costs to the Prisoner Assessment Unit was around £8,000 and; (ii) to clarify the status of the review.
(AQW 19622/11-15)

Mr Ford: A Prison Service review has established that the actual cost to NIPS of treatment, in respect of the prisoner's wife, was £4,800, not £8,000.

AQW/18697/11-15 confirms that NIPS did not meet any costs for transport for the prisoner's wife.

The review into the circumstances surrounding this case is still ongoing.

Harold Greer

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail a breakdown of the costs in the case of Harold Greer at Londonderry Crown Court.
(AQW 19623/11-15)

Mr Ford: The estimated costs to date of the trial and associated hearings relating to the case of Harold Greer at Londonderry Crown Court are detailed in the table below:

Cost Type	**Estimated Cost £**
PSNI[1]	Not Available
PPS Prosecution[2]	3,404.04
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)[3]	13,585.20
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	4,586.50
Jury Costs	1,044.63
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	485.00
Total	**23,105.37**

1 The PSNI have not provided costs. All duty associated with the case was pre-detailed duty and no additional costs were incurred.

2 This figure represents the costs paid by PPS to date, however final costs for all fees for counsel and witness expenses have not yet been billed.

3 This represents an estimated cost from the Legal Services Commission for Crown Court fees. No claims have been received to date in this case.

Death in Custody: Colin Bell

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18806/11-15, to detail the reason for applying an exemption under the Data Protection Act 1998 in terms of withholding the requested information.
(AQW 19664/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) withheld the information requested to protect the identity of those concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prison Service Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18877/11-15, and given the delay in producing a new Code of Conduct and Discipline whether senior Northern Ireland Prison Service management gave consideration to adapting the Ministry of Justice National Offender Service Conduct and Discipline Code issued on 4 March 2010 for those directly employed by NOMS and Her Majesty's Prison Service to meet the needs of the NI Prison officers.
(AQW 19670/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in my answer to AQW/18877/11-15, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has overall policy responsibility for Conduct and Discipline in the Department of Justice. The new Prison Service Code of Conduct has therefore had to be developed with appropriate input from DFP as well as other business partners including the National Offender Management Service.

Hydebank Wood: Prisoner Association

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18619/11-15, whether the prisoners in question have been afforded adequate association under Rule 55, which states that every prisoner shall be given the opportunity of association for not less than one hour each day which may be taken as exercise in the open air, weather permitting.
(AQW 19671/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Rule 55 does not apply to inmates of a Young Offenders Centre. Recreation for this category of inmate is provided for in Prison Rule 96 (2). This states that 'inmates shall regularly be given such physical recreation, training and exercise as are required to promote health and physical well-being'.

I am satisfied that this Rule is being correctly applied within Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.

Kerb Crawling

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions, broken down by court division, have been secured for kerb crawling in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19672/11-15)

Mr Ford: Kerb crawling may be prosecuted under Article 60 of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. This act came into effect on 2nd February 2009 and data shows there were no convictions for kerb crawling in 2009, the latest year for which data is available.

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Conditional Discharges

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AWQ 19272/11-15, whether a conditional discharge is to be treated as a conviction once the related proceedings have come to an end and the individual concerned has not breached its terms.
(AQW 19687/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to my previous answer, a conditional discharge is given by the court following a conviction and as such will form part of any criminal record used by the court for sentencing purposes in any subsequent conviction. The conditional discharge does not however constitute a conviction for the purposes of putting a suspended sentence into effect.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 also applies to the conditional discharge. The rehabilitation period for a conditional discharge is one year or the period of conditional discharge whichever is longer. Once the rehabilitation period has been completed the conviction is treated as spent and in many instances need not be declared for employment purposes.

There are nevertheless certain occupations or situations where the conditional discharge must still be made known. As also indicated in my previous answer, the conditional discharge will form part of a standard or enhanced criminal record conviction certificate – though not part of a basic certificate – as produced by AccessNI.

The full legislative provisions on the conditional discharge are provided in Articles 4 to 7 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Legal Aid

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total amount of Legal Aid provided, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19691/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amount of expenditure on legal aid funding, excluding administration costs, in each of the last three financial years is as follows.

09/10	£96.9m
10/11	£93.3m
11/12	£101.7m

Prison Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18759/11-15, to provide a breakdown of how many are (i) male; (ii) female; and (iii) former prison officers.
(AQW 19743/11-15)

Mr Ford: Of the 79 staff recorded as having declared a disability 37 are male and 42 are female. This total includes two male prison officers who left the Service during the past year.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18877/11-15 and given that the Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline is almost 18 years old, for his assessment of prison officers not being afforded fairness comparable to that of their counterparts in Great Britain where the discipline code is up-to-date and includes mandatory fundamental procedures that are not applicable to Northern Ireland prison officers,
(AQW 19755/11-15)

Mr Ford: It would be inappropriate to compare the operation of the current Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct, which was agreed locally, with the disciplinary codes of other jurisdictions.

Gangmasters

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured against unlicensed gangmasters, per court division, in each of the last five years,
(AQW 19756/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Gangmasters Licensing Authority has confirmed that in the last five years there were 3 convictions against unlicensed gangmasters – one in 2010 at Omagh Magistrates' Court and two in 2012 at Armagh Magistrates' Court.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17821/11-15, to detail (i) the grade of the staff member of the Northern Ireland Prison Service leading the Code of Conduct and Discipline project; (ii) when the person was appointed and by whom; (iii) how many Northern Ireland Prison Service staff, broken down by grade, are involved in the project; and (iv) when they were appointed and by whom.
(AQW 19757/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Grade 7 developing the new disciplinary system for the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), including the new Code of Conduct, was appointed on 16 January 2012 through the HR Directorate in Prison Service Headquarters.

As stated in my answer to AQW 17821/11-15, the Grade 7 is working on this process alongside a range of key stakeholders from the Department of Justice, the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Prison Governors' Association, and the Prison Officers' Association.

Prisoners: GCSE Qualifications

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of prisoners who gained GCSE qualifications in grades A* - C or equivalent; and (ii) the number of qualifications broken down by age group, in the last three academic years.
(AQW 19760/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the calendar years 2010, 2011 and 2012 the numbers of prisoners who gained GCSE qualifications in grades A* - C or equivalent are as follows:

Grade	**C**	**C**	**C**	**B**	**B**	**B**	**A**	**A**	**A**	**A***	**A***	**A***
	2010	**2011**	**2012**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
18 - 25	43	51	74	2	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
26 - 35	115	91	90	3	4	5	-	1	2	-	6	2
36 - 45	45	37	35	4	1	3	2	-	-	-	-	-
46 - 55	35	16	22	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-
56 + over	5	4	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	-
Totals	**243**	**199**	**222**	**10**	**5**	**9**	**4**	**2**	**3**	**-**	**8**	**2**

Prisoners: Higher Education Qualifications

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number and age profile of prisoners who have been awarded higher education qualifications, in the last three years.
(AQW 19761/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the last three years the number and age profile of prisoners awarded higher education qualifications are included in the tables below:-

Table A: Hydebank Wood

	2010	2011	2012
18 – 25	1	6	7
Totals	**1**	**6**	**7**

Table B: Maghaberry

	2010	2011	2012
18 – 25	2	0	0
26 – 35	5	4	6
36 – 45	3	3	2
46 – 55	1	1	0
56 + over	0	0	0
Totals	**11**	**8**	**8**

Table C: Magilligan

	2010	2011	2012
18 – 25	0	0	2
26 – 35	16	15	21
36 – 45	5	14	7
46 – 55	10	9	6
56 + over	2	1	4
Totals	**33**	**39**	**40**

High Court Case Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17560/11-15, to detail the estimated costs in Legal Aid for a typical case of this nature, taking into consideration the level of counsel and the duration.
(AQW 19796/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission does not receive any bills or indication of the costs of High Court cases until the bill has been taxed by the Taxing Master.

The average cost paid by the Commission for High Court cases of this nature during the period April – December 2012 was £9,138. The Commission cannot indicate if the costs in this case are likely to be greater or lesser than this figure.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Training Days

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18448/11-15, to detail (i) the average number of training days each prison staff member received in 2011/12 and; (ii) how this compares with 2010/11 when the Key Performance Target was five days but the average training was 3.4 days.
(AQW 19799/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) In 2011/12 an average of 2.6 training days was delivered per staff member.

(ii) The average training days for 2011/12 were limited as a direct result of staff not being available for training due to operational needs.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Dismissals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the total number of officers and healthcare staff dismissed from the Northern Ireland Prison Service since 2005, broken down by grade and gender; (ii) the number of staff that, on appeal to the Northern Ireland Prison Service, were notified that the Code of Conduct and Discipline and/or other statutory procedures during the investigation and adjudication were not adhered to; (iii) the number of successful appeals; and (iv) the number of staff that appealed to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appeals Board and in respect of each, whether the panel found that the decision to dismiss was unfair or that proper procedures were not complied with.
(AQW 19807/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 01 January 2005, 30 officers including healthcare staff were dismissed from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) for either disciplinary or inefficiency reasons. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of numbers by grade in view of the necessity to protect the identity of those concerned. However, the breakdown by gender is 21 male and nine female.

Of those who appealed the dismissal to NIPS none were notified that the Code of Conduct and Discipline and/or other statutory procedures during the investigation and adjudication were not adhered to; but this may have been raised as mitigation and discussed at appeal. There were no successful appeals.

Since 1 January 2005, 14 officers dismissed from NIPS appealed to the Civil Service Appeal Board (CSAB). To date, in six of the appeals the CSAB found that either the decision to dismiss was unfair or proper procedures were not followed.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust assumed responsibility for the delivery of prison healthcare services in April 2008, though staff remained employed by NIPS. In April 2012, the Trust assumed employment responsibility for prison healthcare staff. Since 1 April 2012, the South Eastern Trust has not implemented any disciplinary procedures in relation to any member of prison healthcare staff.

Questions for Written Answer: AQW 18388/11-15

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18388/11-15, to detail any exemption used applied by the Northern Ireland Prison Service within the scope of the Data Protection Act in respect of each of the five parts of the question.
(AQW 19809/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service withheld the information in respect of each of the five parts of the question in order to protect the identity of those concerned.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18877/11-15, to detail (i) the complexities; (ii) the reasons for the delay, given that the Code of Conduct and Discipline was raised in the Pearson Review Team Report in June 2009, in the Ackah and Deane Report in December 2009, in the NI Civil Service Appeals Board Annual Report of 2009/2010 and by various external agencies since those dates; (iii) whether the new Code of Conduct and Discipline is in development or draft format; and (iv) when the new system will be fully operational.
(AQW 19811/11-15)

Mr Ford: A draft format of the new Code of Conduct is currently being considered by the Northern Ireland Prison Service along with key business partners. With regard to the other points raised, I refer the Member to the responses given to AQW 17821/11-15 and AQW 18877/11-15.

Courthouses: Union Flag

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to list all the courthouses that did not fly the Union flag on a designated day during the last twelve months and to detail the action taken by the Department in each case.
(AQW 19813/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Union flag was not flown at Ballymena, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Dungannon Courthouses on 6 February 2013 due to an oversight by G4S Secure Solutions (UK) Limited (G4S), the security and ancillary services provider to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). This is being addressed through contract management mechanisms.

There has been one other instance when the Union flag was not flown on a designated day in the last 12 months. This occurred at Newtownards Courthouse on Sunday 11 November 2012, when G4S could not get access to the flagpole as contractors had inadvertently sealed the access window during repairs. G4S reported this to the NICTS site Premises Officer and the contractors were recalled to reinstate access.

Inquests

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement that up to 21 inquests are now likely to proceed, to outline the expected duration of these inquests and the estimated total cost.
(AQW 19817/11-15)

Mr Ford: The duration and cost to prepare for and hear an inquest can vary significantly depending on a range of factors including the volume of evidence and complexity of the issues to be considered.

It is not therefore possible to provide accurate estimates of either the duration or costs of these inquests.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the projected annual maintenance costs of Bangor Courthouse when it has closed.
(AQW 19818/11-15)

Mr Ford: The projected maintenance costs for Bangor Courthouse, after closure, are estimated at between £2,500 and £3,000 per annum.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what measures his Department uses to tackle anti-social behaviour.
(AQW 19826/11-15)

Mr Ford: The measures which my Department uses to tackle anti-social behaviour are based on partnership working at a strategic and local level to deliver a range of interventions based on a model of prevention, intervention and enforcement.

The Community Safety Strategy 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities' recognised that several statutory agencies have a role to play in addressing anti-social behaviour and in order to effectively tackle anti-social behaviour all of these agencies would have to work in unison.

To enhance partnership working at a strategic level my Department has established an interagency anti-social behaviour Delivery Group, to take forward the delivery of the strategic objectives of the Community Safety Strategy. The Delivery Group has developed an Action Plan which incorporates measures designed to agree roles and responsibilities of agencies in responding to incidents of anti-social behaviour, ensuring appropriate powers are in place to tackle anti-social behaviour and to take forward recommendations from the recent Criminal Justice Inspection report on the criminal justice system's approach to addressing anti-social behaviour.

At a local level, tackling anti-social behaviour is a strategic priority for the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and their local action plans include measures and initiatives to deal with locally identified problems of anti-social behaviour. These measures will vary depending on local concerns but include neighbourhood watch, use of CCTV, community safety wardens, educational programmes, engagement and diversionary programmes and intergenerational programmes.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Declared Unfit for Duty

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide a breakdown by prison facility of (i) number of prison staff who were declared unfit for duty in 2011 because of illness or injury; (ii) number of days for which they were absent; and (iii) the cost of their absence to the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
(AQW 19854/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below shows the number of prison staff declared unfit for duty broken down by prison establishment, and covers the period 1 January 2011 - 31 December 2011:

Establishment	Number of Staff Absent	Working Days Absent
Hydebank Wood	181	5180
Maghaberry	486	15244
Magilligan	173	4608
PECCS	108	3868
Total	**948**	**28900**

The cost during that period to the Northern Ireland Prison Service in terms of Occupational Sick Pay was £3,460,079.18.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether newly qualified prison staff shadow experienced prison officers when they are first in contact with prisoners or enter landings; and how long any such shadowing is carried out before new officers are allowed to operate without supervision.
(AQW 19856/11-15)

Mr Ford: Within each prison establishment newly qualified prison staff shadow experienced prison staff when they initially come into contact with prisoners or enter landings. The length of time shadowing experienced staff continues is dependent on operational constraints.

Alleged Payment of Prisoner Drug Debts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 5315/11-15, whether he consider any revision to his answer in light of the assertion that two Northern Ireland Prison Service staff were instructed to take the money to the home of a relative of the prisoner in question in full knowledge that it was to settle a drug debt and commit a crime of aiding and abetting the commission of an offence.
(AQW 19857/11-15)

Mr Ford: The response to AQW/5315/11-15 was based on a full and thorough investigation of all of the circumstances and information available at that time.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not have any new or additional information that would require any further consideration to be given to the outcome of the investigation and the preventative actions already taken.

Prisons: Body Scanners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the cost to date of the prison scanner search pilots in (i) HMP Hydebank; and (ii) HMP Magilligan, including equipment and staff training.
(AQW 19864/11-15)

Mr Ford: The costs to date of the pilots of millimetre wave technology are as follows:

Magilligan Prison	Hydebank Wood
£14232	£22019

The costs included in these prices are for installation of the equipment, leases, enabling works and staff training.

The equipment leased for Magilligan was an ex-demonstration machine hence the differential in costs.

Prisons: Body Scanners

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, if the outcome of the current body scan pilot scheme for prisons proves to be inconclusive, whether he intends to commission a further pilot scheme with other machines.
(AQW 19876/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am committed to seeking a viable, less intrusive alternative to our existing practice of full searching.

Although the recently completed pilot and evaluation of Millimetre Wave technology showed that there were limitations to it as an alternative to full body searching, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) will, if possible, continue to work with suppliers to see if such technology can be improved for application in the prison environment.

I also intend to take forward a Justification Application under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004 in relation to the initial piloting and possible use of Transmission X-ray scanners.

This application is well advanced and it is expected that it will be ready for submission to the Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) within a few weeks.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how many Anti-Social Behaviour Orders have been issued, broken down by (i) gender; (ii) age group; and (iii) constituency in the last 12 months.
(AQW 19937/11-15)

Mr Ford: The most up-to-date statistics from the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service show there were 12 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) issued during 2012.

The 12 ASBOs are broken down as follows:

(i) Gender - 12 male, 0 female,

(ii) Age group - Six ASBOs were issued to males aged under 18, five ASBOs were issued to males aged over 18 and the age of one ASBO recipient was unknown, and

(iii) Assembly Constituency - Three ASBO recipients lived in North Belfast, three lived in South Antrim, two lived in North Antrim, two lived in South Down, one lived in East Belfast and the Assembly Constituency of one ASBO recipient was unknown.

Historical Enquiries Team

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Justice why he is unable to answer questions relating to the Historical Enquiries Team.
(AQW 19972/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Minister of Justice I am responsible for providing the legal and resourcing framework for the Historical Enquiries Team's (HET) reviews into past cases and am happy to answer any questions on these matters. However the scope and remit of the HET 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 any operational questions you may have about the HET to the PSNI.

PSNI: Injury-on-duty Award Reviews

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether he has considered suspending injury on duty award reviews for retired officers reaching the age of 65.
(AQW 19987/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under Regulation 35 (1) of the PSNI and PSNI Reserve (Injury Benefit) Regulations the Policing Board is legally obliged to periodically review the degree of disablement of an injury-on-duty award. It is a matter for the Policing Board to decide if a suspension of reviews is appropriate.

PSNI: Injury-on-duty Award Reviews

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Injury-on-Duty Award Reviews for those aged 65 have been carried out, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19988/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Policing Board provided the following details of reviews carried out at age 65 by the Selected Medical Practitioner:

2008	11
2009	31
2010	1
2011	0
2012	36
2013 (as at 20/02/13)	1
Total	**80**

PSNI: Injury-on-duty Award Reviews

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has sought legal advice on the legality of reviewing Injury on Duty Awards when the recipient reaches the age of 65.
(AQW 19989/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has not sought legal advice on reviews of Injury on Duty awards when the recipient reaches the age of 65. The arrangement of reviews is the responsibility of the Policing Board as per Regulation 35 (1) of the Injury Benefit Regulations 2006.

PSNI: Injury-on-duty Award Reviews

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the arrangements in place to convey, in confidence, the Results of Injury on Duty Awards to recipients, given the security threat posed to former police officers.
(AQW 19990/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department and the Policing Board take all measures possible to ensure the security of former officers is not compromised. It would not be appropriate to detail the arrangements in place as to do so would, in itself, compromise such arrangements.

Community Restorative Justice Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many Community Restorative Justice Schemes are in operation.
(AQW 19997/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are 15 community-based Restorative Justice Schemes accredited under the Government Protocol which are currently operational.

Human Trafficking

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice to detail the aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill that will tackle Human Trafficking.
(AQW 20051/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Justice Bill introduces new offences of human trafficking which will bring Northern Ireland law into line with the criminal aspects of the EU Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings. The new offences respond to the international dimension of human trafficking and ensure that those operating across international borders are not immune from prosecution.

Clause 5 will create an offence to enable the prosecution of a British citizen, habitual resident of Northern Ireland or body incorporated under the law of a part of the United Kingdom who has trafficked someone anywhere outside the United Kingdom for sexual exploitation. Clause 6 will create a similar offence where a person has been trafficked outside the United Kingdom for labour or other exploitation. Clause 6 also removes the requirement for the victim to have been previously trafficked into the United Kingdom so that an offence will have been committed where a person who has not previously been trafficked into the United Kingdom is trafficked within the United Kingdom for the purposes of labour or other exploitation. This is already an offence in relation to trafficking for sexual exploitation.

In addition, Clause 6A of the Bill will remove the existing provision for summary conviction of human trafficking offences, to make human trafficking offences triable on indictment in the Crown Court, where the maximum term available is generally 14 years. As a consequence, sentences for human trafficking offences will be included in the schedule of offences referable to the Court of Appeal by the Director of Public Prosecutions on the grounds that he considers them to be unduly lenient.

Union Flag: Court Estate Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to outline the number and location of court estate properties that are subject to the designated days principle for the flying of the Union flag.
(AQW 20105/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 21 courthouses subject to the flying of the Union flag on designated days. These are listed on the table below:

Building	Location
Antrim Courthouse	Castle Way, Antrim
Armagh Courthouse	The Mall, Armagh
Ballymena Courthouse	Albert Place, Ballymena
Bangor Courthouse	Quay Street, Bangor
Coleraine Courthouse	Mountsandel Road, Coleraine
Craigavon Courthouse	Central Way, Craigavon
Downpatrick Courthouse	English Street, Downpatrick
Dungannon Courthouse	Killyman Road, Dungannon
Enniskillen Courthouse	East Bridge Street, Enniskillen
Laganside Courts	Oxford Street, Belfast
Larne Courthouse	Victoria Road, Larne
Limavady Courthouse	Main Street, Limavady
Lisburn Courthouse	Railway Street, Lisburn
Londonderry Courthouse	Bishop Street, Londonderry
Magherafelt Courthouse	Hospital Road, Magherafelt
Newry Courthouse	New Street, Newry
Newtownards Courthouse	Regent Street, Newtownards
Old Townhall Building	Victoria Street, Belfast
Omagh Courthouse	High Street, Omagh
Royal Courts of Justice	Chichester Street, Belfast
Strabane Courthouse	Derry Road, Strabane

Antisocial Behaviour: Bangor and Holywood

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what action is being taken to tackle anti-social behaviour in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood town centres.
(AQW 20176/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department supports a range of initiatives designed to tackle anti-social behaviour across North Down at both a strategic and local level.

North Down Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP) has identified tackling anti-social behaviour as one of its key strategic priorities. The PCSP Action Plan for 2012-2013 includes several local initiatives aimed at addressing anti-social behaviour 'hotspots' within the North Down Borough.

These initiatives include the Priority Youth Engagement and the Streetsafe Mobile Youth Engagement projects, both working with 'hard to reach' young people to provide advice and support, as well as educational and personal development opportunities. These programmes are delivered within areas of identified need throughout North Down, including Bangor town centre and the Holywood districts of Redburn and Loughview.

At weekends, Bangor town centre also has in place a Street Pastor Service, the Community Safety Warden scheme and a project called Bangor Against Night-time Disorder (BAND), all of which are aimed primarily at reducing and preventing violent and alcohol-related crime, as well as anti-social behaviour.

Through local consultation, North Down PCSP is currently developing its action plan for April 2013 to March 2015. This will aim to address locally identified policing and community safety issues, including anti-social behaviour.

Union Flag

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether a member of staff in a courthouse has been suspended for failing to take down a Union flag; (ii) on what date the alleged incident occurred; (iii) when and how the matter was reported; (iv) when the member of staff was suspended and on what grounds; (v) which court house was involved; (v) on what date he was made aware of the incident; and (vi) whether an allegation such as this constitutes a criminal offence.
(AQW 20184/11-15)

Mr Ford: No member of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS) staff has been suspended for failing to take down a Union flag.

The raising and lowering of the Union flag on NICTS buildings on designated days is carried out under contract by G4S Secure Solution Ltd (G4S). Any disciplinary action regarding the performance of duties by G4S employees is a matter for G4S.

Flying the Union flag on a day not designated under The Flags Regulations (NI) 2000 is not a criminal offence.

Department for Regional Development

Translink Pupil Pass

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many pupils applied for a Translink Pupil Pass; and (ii) how many Pupil Passes were issued, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19608/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The table below sets out the information provided by Translink.

	Applications	Passes issued
2011/12	2,614	1,601
2010/11	3,087	1,949
2009/10	3,882	2,393

Translink Pupil Pass

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for a breakdown of the numbers of Translink Pupil Passes issued for (a) Metro only services; (b) Ulsterbus only services; (c) NI Railways only services; and (d) a combination of services; (ii) to detail the annual cost for Pupil Passes issued; and (iii) to itemise the separable costs of passes issued for (a) Metro only services; (b) Ulsterbus only services; (c) NI Railways only services: and (d) a combination of services, for each of the last three years.
(AQW 19609/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below sets out the information provided by Translink.

	Metro Only		Ulsterbus Only	
	Passes	Costs*	Passes	Cost*
2011/12	261	£57,335.53	1055	£284,375.98
2010/11	305	£87,064.74	1339	£369,653.36
2009/10	348	£81,071.59	1707	£458,769.78

	NIR Only		Combination	
	Passes	Cost*	Passes	Cost*
2011/12	271	£79,127.35	14	£5,398.27
2010/11	292	£68,195.32	13	£4,415.19
2009/10	319	£94,183.41	19	£5,913.87

* Costs = Costs to customer and revenue to Translink

Narrow Water Bridge

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 19002/11-15, what are the implications on the proposal for the Narrow Water bridge project; and whether there is a requirement for legislation to enable this proposal.
(AQW 19657/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As a general principle, obstruction or extinguishment of public rights of navigation requires legislation. The extent to which any public rights of navigation in Northern Ireland may be obstructed, by the proposed bridge, is being taken account of as part of a detailed consideration of the proposed design.

Where a person other than DRD proposes to construct a bridge over navigable waters in circumstances to which Article 4 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 applies, DRD must seek to make an Order under that Order and in accordance with Schedule 8 to the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

Speed Limit

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to reducing the speed limit in built up areas to 20 miles per hour.
(AQW 19661/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service's existing speed management policy is highly supportive of the roll-out of 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits in residential areas and in urban locations, where high numbers of vulnerable road users are present. The Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020 contains Action Measures which are reflective of Roads Service policy.

When assessing the potential for a road to have a 20 mph speed limit introduced, many factors have to be taken into account, such as mean speed, collision history, streetscape, community support, function and demographics. Each road will likely be different in terms of its suitability to have a reduced limit applied and the normal solution has been to install engineering measures, such as road humps and central islands, so the reduced speed limit is, in effect, self enforcing.

The Road Safety Strategy also contains a commitment to pilot schemes for 20 mph limits without additional self-enforcing engineering measures. All these commitments are subject to the availability of funding in these financially-constrained times. Agreement has now been reached with the PSNI on enforcement issues for 4 pilot schemes and Roads Service is currently identifying suitable sites. Roads Service will, in due course, be monitoring the effectiveness of these schemes, along with similar pilots being undertaken in tandem by road authorities in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, to inform the way forward on this issue.

Rural Roads Maintenance: Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on rural roads maintenance and capital works in the Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt Council areas, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 19673/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service accounts do not separately distinguish between urban or rural roads, however, details of the maintenance and capital expenditure for the entire road network in Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt council areas in the 2009/10 – 20011/12 financial years are provided in the table below:

		2009/10 (£k)	2010/11 (£k)	2011/12 (£k)
Magherafelt	Capital	3,190	2,843	3,216
	Operation & Maintenance	1,925	2,797	2,207
Cookstown	Capital	2,365	2,520	3,778
	Operation & Maintenance	1,866	1,902	2,109
Dungannon	Capital	6,750	5,509	7,573
	Operation & Maintenance	3,149	4,446	3,290

It should be noted that, while base levels of expenditure will generally reflect the size of the relevant network, substantial variations across boundaries and years can arise, primarily due to expenditure on major capital works schemes, such as the A4 and Carland Bridge and/or the relative success of bids during the various Monitoring Rounds.

Bus Passes

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria used on applications to half price bus passes for people with a disability.
(AQW 19674/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently 4 different categories under which a person may apply for a Half Fare SmartPass. The categories and their respective criteria are:

Disability Living Allowance: The applicant must be in receipt of either the higher or lower Mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Partially Sighted: The applicant must be registered with a Health & Social Care Trust as partially sighted.

Learning Disability: The applicant must be known to a Health & Social Care Trust as having a learning disability.

Licence Refused: The applicant must have had a driving licence refused or revoked on medical grounds.

Water and Sewerage Charges: Annual Revenue from Non-domestic Properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the annual revenue from water charges for businesses.
(AQW 19688/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the revenue for all non-domestic properties liable for measured and unmeasured water and sewerage charges was around £70 million in 2012. This revenue will change each year as tariffs are updated.

Water and Sewerage Charges: Non-payment by Businesses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the level of non-payment of water charges by businesses in each of the last two years.
(AQW 19695/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that out of a total annual revenue of around £70 million for all non-domestic properties liable for measured and unmeasured water and sewerage charges the level of non-payment was around £1.7 million in 2011 and £1.8 million in 2012.

Railways: Londonderry to Coleraine Line

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the planned reopening of the Londonderry to Coleraine railway line on 24 March 2013, what marketing will be used to promote the service.
(AQW 19737/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it plans a significant integrated marketing campaign for the end of March/beginning of April to coincide with the re-opening of the line on 24 March.

An advertising campaign will include radio, press, outdoor, digital and social media. It will be targeted to locations on the Londonderry Line, including Derry~Londonderry, Coleraine, Ballymena, Antrim and Limavady.

Greater Belfast media release and public relations activity will also target daily, regional and broadcast press. A household mailing of the timetable and a voucher to incentivise travel will be undertaken.

An official opening event will take place, along with a series of local community events and joint marketing with local stakeholders (including Councils, Tourism partners and City of Culture) will be delivered.

Car Parking: On-street Facilities in Belfast

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the monies generated from motorists using on-street parking facilities in Belfast, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19739/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of income generated from the use of on-street parking facilities in Belfast, in each of the last five financial years, are provided in the table below:

Financial Year	Income Generated
2011/12	£2,710,492
2010/11	£2,485,701

Financial Year	Income Generated
2009/10	£2,435,486
2008/09	£2,437,581
2007/08	£2,398,818

er will be aware that the costs associated with the provision of parking services and parking enforcement, including contractual payments to NSL Services Group, exceed income received from the use of on and off-street parking and parking enforcement and the deficit is funded by my Department.

Street Lighting

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria that determine whether a road is eligible for street lighting.
(AQW 19742/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service uses a wide range of criteria to determine whether a road is eligible for street lighting, depending on the type of road and situation being considered. The key issues are generally whether lighting will enhance safety for road users, and improve the effectiveness of the road network.

At a more detailed level, the following criteria are the most commonly used:

- for major traffic routes, street lighting is provided where it is justified on the basis of economic appraisal, and at roundabouts and certain types of junctions;
- in urban areas, street lighting is generally provided for most built-up roads within the speed limit, although paths which only give rear access to properties, or are alternative routes to already lighted roads or footpaths, will generally not be lit; and
- in rural areas, street lighting may be provided where it would contribute to a reduction in the number of night-time collisions, or where there is a community of at least 10 dwellings located within a 200m road length. In applying this criterion, each public building, which has a significant level of evening use by the community, will count as two dwellings.

Further detail in relation to the relevant criteria for any specific situation may be obtained by contacting the street lighting engineer at the local Roads Service Divisional Headquarters.

Translink Buses: Fuel

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on fuel for buses, for each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 19749/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following table details the relevant information which has been provided to me by Translink. It should be noted that the fuel costs quoted are the gross cost, not reduced by fuel duty rebate. It should also be noted Translink fuel costs are impacted by fuel hedging arrangements.

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Ulsterbus	£20,758,769	£20,018,734	£23,067,273
Metro	£6,966,597	£6,903,049	£7,725,032

Traffic Wardens

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic wardens are employed.
(AQW 19750/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is assumed the Member's question refers to within Northern Ireland. Traffic Attendants are employed by a private company, NSL Services Group, which is contracted by my Department's Roads Service to provide parking enforcement and car park management services.

NSL has confirmed that, as of 13 February 2013, a total of 177 Traffic Attendants and Senior Traffic Attendants are employed by the company.

Car Parking

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking tickets have been issued for cars overstaying their time at sites operated by his Department.
(AQW 19751/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: 7,678 Penalty Charge Notices (parking tickets) were issued, during the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012, to vehicles in Roads Service's Pay and Display car parks that had stayed beyond the permitted time period, as displayed on the parking ticket.

In the same period, 4,924 parking tickets were issued to vehicles, after the expiry of time paid for at on-street Pay and Display locations and 104 parking tickets were issued to vehicles which were parked for longer than permitted at on-street 'limited waiting' locations.

It should be noted that in all cases, a ten minute grace period is allowed beyond the period permitted for parking, whether it be paid or limited free waiting.

Door-2-Door Transport Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development in light of his statement on door-to-door transport on 12 February 2013, whether there will be any reduction in the services.
(AQW 19753/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer to my statement to the House. In bringing forward the changes, my Department does so with the intention that the maximum level of service cannot only be maintained but improved. There will be no cut to the budget for the delivery of services under this interim arrangement and it would be my hope that Disability Action and the operators will have success in not only maintaining services but improving them.

A4 Dual Carriageway

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development how many householders who live alongside the A4 dual carriageway have been compensated as a result of damage to their property following its construction.
(AQW 19759/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: To date, my Department has received 185 claims for compensation for loss of property (Part 1 Claim under the Lands Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order), following vesting of lands in respect of the A4 dual carriageway, and the A4 Annaghilla and A5 Tullyvar road realignments. Of these, 157 have been agreed under all heads of claim, including injurious affection to retained lands. Injurious affection includes, for example, severance and physical factors, such as noise, vibration etc.

My Department is also in receipt of 15 further claims for injurious affection to properties where land has not been vested from the owner (Part 2 Claims under the Lands Compensation Order). None of these have currently been agreed for payment.

Railways: Derry to Coleraine Line

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to promote and market the re-opening of the Derry to Coleraine railway line.
(AQW 19763/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised it plans a significant integrated marketing campaign for the end of March/beginning of April to coincide with the re-opening of the line on 24 March.

An advertising campaign will include radio, press, outdoor, digital and social media. It will be targeted to locations on the Londonderry Line, including Limavady, Antrim, Ballymena, Coleraine and Londonderry.

Greater Belfast media release and public relations activity will also target daily, regional and broadcast press. A household mailing of the timetable and a voucher to incentivise travel will be undertaken.

An official opening event will take place, along with a series of local community events and joint marketing with local stakeholders (including Councils, Tourism partners and City of Culture) will be delivered.

A6 Road Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed A6 scheme.
(AQW 19767/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the Northern Ireland Executive Budget 2011-15 allocated funds to continue development work of a dual carriageway from Londonderry to Dungiven, including a dual carriageway bypass of Dungiven, as one overall project.

I am highly supportive of this particular scheme and a number of other significant projects, including the A26 Glarryford Dualling, York Street Interchange and A6 Randalstown to Castledawson.

I can confirm that development work for the complete Londonderry to Dungiven project is well advanced. Following the publication of Draft Orders for the overall scheme, in December 2011, I approved the holding of a Public Inquiry to give objectors, supporters, my Department's Roads Service and others a fair opportunity to be heard and put forward their case either for, or against, the scheme. The Public Inquiry sat for six days between 24 September and 2 October 2012. The Inspector expects to complete his report before the end of March 2013. Having given careful consideration to his findings and recommendations, I will, in due course, issue a response in the form of a Departmental Statement.

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021 includes construction of a number of high priority schemes on the M2, A6 and A26, as part of a £390 million package funded through alternative finance in the period 2015/16 to 2020/21. However, a commitment to fund the revenue consequences of this roads package will be required, therefore, the timing will depend upon future resource budget settlements. In the event of alternative finance not being available, the scheme could be included, together with other priority schemes, in the bidding process for conventional funds, in the next Budget period.

River Foyle: New Bridge

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the plans for a new traffic bridge over the River Foyle, Derry.
(AQW 19768/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that following a review of the strategic road network around Londonderry, a report, published in 2010, concluded there would be a benefit in providing a new road bridge across the Foyle in the vicinity of Newbuildings. This was only in the context of a larger project linking the A6 to the A5 and on to other possible National Roads Authority schemes in County Donegal.

This link is still at the conceptual stage and is not part of the current strategic roads programme, but may be considered, along with other competing priorities, for inclusion in future roads programmes.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 19202/11-15, why the anticipated £40m transfer from the Harbour Commissioners to the Executive budget will not be available and why it was not known when the announcement was made that it would be secured as part of the Executive's fundraising efforts.
(AQW 19812/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My previous answer explained that the detail on delivering the Belfast Harbour Commissioners' contribution was delegated to the Budget Review Group.

The Budget Review Group agreed that the Department should focus on working collaboratively with the Belfast Harbour Commissioners on release of value projects. As I previously explained, it was agreed that the Commissioners would take forward, from within their resources, proposals for investment in Foreign Direct Investment accommodation in 2013/14 and consider other suitable projects in future years.

Traffic: Average Speed at Peak Times in Belfast

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 19051/11-15, to detail the average peak speed of traffic on arterial roads in Greater Belfast between 2001 and 2011.
(AQW 19823/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that Roads Service carries out a Journey Time Survey for the Belfast Metropolitan Area on a biennial basis, to measure the journey times on 11 predetermined routes in the Belfast Metropolitan Area during the morning peak traffic period.

Details of the results of the surveys carried out in 2001, 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011, indicating the average speeds during the morning peak period (07.30 – 09.15) are provided in the table below:

	Total Average Speed (mph)				
Routes	**2011**	**2009**	**2007**	**2005**	**2001**
M2 / A2 Westbound	36.27	35.58	40.30	34.23	34.03
M2 / A2 Eastbound	37.15	32.66	27.89	38.66	44.71
Newtownards Road Inbound	10.66	15.58	8.86	8.58	15.83
Newtownards Road Outbound	17.73	23.24	21.47	18.16	28.77
Orbital (A55) Eastbound	21.33	25.20	22.71	24.75	21.79
Orbital (A55) Westbound	19.19	25.20	21.08	25.46	20.69
Castlereagh Road Inbound	10.71	14.12	17.17	17.48	13.43
Castlereagh Road Outbound	17.16	18.91	19.11	20.15	21.52

	Total Average Speed (mph)				
Routes	**2011**	**2009**	**2007**	**2005**	**2001**
Ormeau Road Inbound	6.37	11.96	10.19	10.29	7.13

Routes	Total Average Speed (mph)				
	2011	2009	2007	2005	2001
Ormeau Road Outbound	21.8	24.16	19.68	21.47	22.50
Lisburn Road Inbound	13.85	17.44	15.32	16.20	13.38
Lisburn Road Outbound	18.12	22.39	23.45	23.43	22.84
M1 / Westlink Inbound	24.57	33.72	16.77	17.55	23.88
M1 / Westlink Outbound	49.64	44.47	29.70	30.90	39.79
Falls Road Inbound	10.73	15.01	8.61	9.09	11.15
Falls Road Outbound	18.5	17.33	16.50	16.39	17.39
Crumlin Road Inbound	16.71	12.45	11.59	12.23	15.34
Crumlin Road Outbound	16.46	19.87	15.94	17.00	22.82
Antrim Road Inbound	18.13	20.70	11.36	11.87	18.27
Antrim Road Outbound	22.32	21.25	24.26	25.77	21.81
Shore Road Inbound	19.03	18.14	18.18	19.94	18.54
Shore Road Outbound	21.46	23.66	23.34	24.79	25.89

Note: The survey was not carried out in 2003.

Potholes: Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to repair potholes on the Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee.
(AQW 19824/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Cannyreagh Road, Donaghadee is inspected on a two monthly cyclical basis and any defects, considered to be hazardous to the public, are identified and programmed for repair in accordance with established Roads Service maintenance guidelines.

The most recent routine inspection of Cannyreagh Road, undertaken on 29 January 2013, identified four recordable defects, in the form of potholes. Defect repairs are carried out within pre-determined target timescales ranging from one day to four weeks, depending on a combination of the severity of the defect and the type of road, as set out in the above-mentioned guidelines. With regard to the four defects noted on the last inspection of Cannyreagh Road, two have been repaired and the remaining two have a target repair date of 26 February 2013.

Other potholes, which may develop between routine inspections and are noted by Roads Service officials or reported by members of the public, are also dealt with in accordance with the maintenance guidelines.

Blue Badge Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether the procedure for renewal of a Blue Badge has changed, particularly in relation to the issue of medical evidence; (ii) to outline any changes that have been made; (ii) when these changes were introduced; (iii) what consultation was taken prior to any changes; and (iv) whether all Badge Holders were notified of the changes which would apply at the time of renewal.
(AQW 19859/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has not made any recent changes to the procedure for renewing a Blue Badge, particularly in relation to the issue of medical evidence.

However, Roads Service is currently developing proposals for changes to the Blue Badge Scheme in Northern Ireland, to take account of the UK wide reform of Disability Living Allowance and how it will use the new assessment for Personal Independence Payment to determine eligibility for a Blue Badge. A number of other administrative changes and improvements to the Blue Badge Scheme are also being considered. Any proposed changes to the Blue Badge Scheme in Northern Ireland will be subjected to full public consultation.

E-car Charge Points

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times each E-car charge point has been used since the activation of the Charge Point Management System in July 2012.
(AQW 19866/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Data on charging point usage is compiled quarterly. The latest data is for the period up to 31 December 2012.

The number of charging events for each charge post from the activation of the Charge Point Management System in July 2012 to 31 December 2012 is contained in the attached table.

Charge Point Location	Charge Point ID	ID number	Number of Charging Events to 31 December 2012
Belfast	Little Victoria Street Car Park	SC22	1
Belfast	Little Donegall Street	SC23	2
Belfast	Cromac Street Car Park	SC33	1
Belfast	Hope Street North	SC03	3
Belfast	Adelaide Street on street	SC19	40
Belfast	Dublin Road on street	SC08	2
Belfast	Lower Crescent on street	SC21	2
Belfast	Central Station car park	SC09	5
Belfast	Cairns Hill Park and Ride	SC35	4
Armagh	Linenhall Street car park	SC02	1
Armagh	Lonsdale Street car park	SC15	
Armagh	Cathedral Road Recreational Centre	SC40	
Armagh	Palace Demense	SC04	3
Newry	Bagenal's Castle	SC05	1
Newry	Bridge Street car park	SC28	1
Newry	Basin Walk car park	SC10	1
Newry	Monaghan Street car park	SC32	1
Newry	Hill Street on street	SC30	
Newry	Canal Court Merchants Quay	SC37	2
Newry	Newry Train station	SC41	3
Londonderry	Victoria Market car park	SC27	8
Londonderry	Bishop Street car park	SC39	
Londonderry	Railway Yard	SC06	
Londonderry	Strand Road	SC07	
Londonderry	Carlisle Road on street	SC25	1
Londonderry	The Diamond on street	SC34	5
Londonderry	Templemore Leisure Centre	SC26	1
Fermanagh	Down/Market/Cross Street	SC18	2
Fermanagh	Eden Street	SC13	9
Fermanagh	Quay Lane North	SC11	1
Fermanagh	Wellington Street	SC16	8
Fermanagh	Queen St,Carpark, Enniskillen	SC17	1
Fermanagh	Cross Street, Carpark, Lisnaskea	SC31	2
Fermanagh	Main Street, Irvinestown – DRD	SC29	
Fermanagh	Main Street, Belleek – DRD	SC12	1
Larne	Narrow Gauge Road	SC14	1
Larne	Agnew Street	SC20	2
Larne	Riverdale	SC01	

Charge Point Location	Charge Point ID	ID number	Number of Charging Events to 31 December 2012
Larne	Carnlough Havelock Place	SC36	1
Cookstown	Southwest College	SC38	2
Dungannon	Rapid Charge Point	RC01	12
Maghera	Rapid Charge Point	RC03	18
Newry	Rapid Charge Point	RC02	43
Portrush (from August 2012)	Rapid Charge Point	RC04	47

Car Parking

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on any plans to transfer control of local car parks to local councils.
(AQW 19871/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In September 2012, I announced a moratorium on the increase in car parking fees which the Executive had sanctioned and funded. As part of this initiative, I undertook that my Departmental officials would consider, with councils who expressed an interest, alternative arrangements for the management of car parks, other than Park and Ride sites.

As explained in my response to the Member's Assembly Question, AQW 19096 11-15, the Minister for the Environment is currently consulting with Executive Colleagues on the list of functions to transfer under the current programme of Local Government Reform. As part of these consultations, I indicated that off-street car parks (other than Park and Ride) could transfer to councils under Local Government Reform proposals. However, this would be subject to there being no detriment to my Department's financial position. Transfer of this function is also subject to careful consideration of a number of other issues. These include, having adequate enforcement, IT and management systems in place in councils, consistency of approach across the councils and the identification of a suitable mechanism for consultation between Roads Service and councils regarding traffic management.

Street Lighting: Galliagh Area of Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact that the removal by Roads Service of street lighting in the Galliagh area of Derry will have on residents' safety.
(AQW 19900/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is renewing the street lighting system in the Galliagh area of Londonderry to upgrade it to modern standards in terms of performance, safety and reliability. The new street lighting will comply with current Roads Service policy and standards. Under that policy, roads and footpaths, which only give rear access to properties or are alternative routes to already lighted roads or footpaths, will generally not be lit.

Given that all houses in the area will have improved street lighting on the roads and footpaths to their front accesses, it is considered that removal of the old street lighting from rear pathways should have no significant impact on the safety of residents.

Sewerage System: Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed sewerage treatment works in Millisle.
(AQW 19919/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its £2.2 million capital project to upgrade the sewerage system in Millisle, to deliver improved bathing waters and reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding within the area, is included in its PC13 Business Plan covering the period April 2013 to March 2015.

Negotiations to obtain a site for a new pumping station at Millisle Presbyterian Church car park were inconclusive and NIW is now in the process of negotiating with Ards Borough Council for a suitable site on council land adjoining the Church car park. When agreement for a suitable site has been reached, NIW will seek planning permission for the pumping station and the consent of Northern Ireland Environment Agency for construction of a new sea outfall pipeline. Subject to obtaining statutory approvals and completion of lands acquisition, NIW will be seeking tenders in late 2013 with the view of construction commencing in Spring 2014 with completion approximately one year later.

Flooding: Surface Water

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many (i) residential; and (ii) commercial properties are at risk due to surface water flooding.
(AQW 19929/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service does not hold the information you have requested.

Responsibility for drainage infrastructure is shared between Roads Service, Rivers Agency and Northern Ireland Water (NIW). Accordingly, officials from these agencies have produced Best Practice Guidelines and a Flooding Hotspots register, detailing procedures for liaison and co-ordination of emergency response. The combined flooding hotspots register, maintained by Rivers Agency, provides details of locations across Northern Ireland at greatest risk of flooding.

In addition, officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have advised that a Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment indicates that around 20,000, or 2.5% of the properties in Northern Ireland, are sited in an area that is shown to be at risk of surface water flooding to a depth greater than 300mm, from a 1 in 200yr [0.5% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP)] rainfall event. Approximately three quarters of these properties are listed as residential.

Roads: Noise Levels

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the permissible increase in road noise levels before his Department will consider mitigation measures.
(AQW 19934/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Increases in noise levels, arising from the construction of a new road, should be considered in terms of both the interior and exterior of residential buildings.

The statutory permissible noise level, arising from construction of a new (or altered) road as set out in the Noise Insulation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (NIR), is 68 decibels (dB). This legislation is intended to ensure that increases in noise levels within the interior of residential buildings, arising from a newly constructed road, should not constitute a nuisance. This legislation sets an exterior noise level of 68 dB as the threshold to establishing whether interior noise levels should constitute a nuisance. The legislation requires that greater than 1dB of noise must be attributable to the new road. In instances where exterior noise levels, arising from a new road, exceed 68dB, my Department has a duty to provide mitigation either by way of a sound barrier (if practicable) or, alternatively, through the provision of noise insulation to residential buildings.

There are no statutory limits on acceptable exterior noise levels to safeguard the enjoyment of gardens/barbeque areas etc by residents. The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), which has been adopted by the four UK Highway Authorities, recommends that when road traffic noise, as a result of a new road, causes an increase in exterior noise levels of 3dB in the long term, a detailed noise assessment should be undertaken, to establish if mitigation measures should be considered. It should be noted that whilst 3dB is the limit to establish if a detailed assessment is required, a 3db increase in noise level cannot automatically be held as constituting a nuisance. The 3dB increase is not seen as a trigger whereby mitigation measures must be implemented, but is instead a threshold of potential significance from which other factors should also be considered, to determine if the impact would be considered significant. If the impact is deemed to be significant, the practicality of mitigation can be reviewed, to establish if the effect can be ameliorated.

Car Parking

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the current policy on the use of public car parks for events.
(AQW 19938/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The use of car parks is regulated by the Off-Street Parking Order (Northern Ireland) 2000. In addition to setting out conditions relating to the parking of vehicles, the Order only authorises the use of car parks for:

- the collection of recyclable materials;
- advertising; and
- displaying information to the public.

For each of these purposes, a licence, issued by my Department, is required.

However, my Department's Roads Service permits councils to use public car parks to facilitate council sponsored events, provided that:

- Roads Service is indemnified against all claims arising from the use of the car park;
- the use of the car park does not contravene the legislation governing the car park, in particular attention would be drawn to the requirement that trading is not permitted; and
- they accept responsibility for the management of the car park, including any temporary diversions required by the use of the car park.

Car parks are generally not made available to private organisations. However, when organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Scouts or Guides request permission for car parks to be used on Sunday afternoons as a starting point for

church parades, Roads Service offers no objection, provided anyone with a right to park in the car park is not denied that right.

Roads Service: Complaints from Whistleblowers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) all investigations arising from complaints by whistleblowers to Roads Service in relation to contracts in the last three years; and (ii) the outcomes of the investigations.
(AQW 19945/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The term "whistleblower" has no formal legal definition; however, it is generally taken to refer to those who are described as "workers" who can make "qualifying disclosures" under the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Order (Northern Ireland) 1998. Whilst there have been four investigations arising from complaints to Roads Service, in relation to contracts, in the last three years, I am able to confirm that only one was made by a "whistleblower" based on the above definition, whereas it is unclear if the sources of the other three complaints were internal or external. Details of all four investigations and the outcomes are provided in the table below:

Nature of Complaint	Outcome of Investigation
Contractor, working for Roads Service, hiring plant from a company in which a RS employee has an interest.	No evidence of impropriety or wrongdoing found.
Shortcomings in Procurement of Maintenance Contract.	Complaint substantiated and disciplinary action taken against a member of staff.
Contractor, working for Roads Service, sub-contracting work to a company run by a family member of a RS employee.	No evidence of impropriety or wrongdoing found.
Roads Service employee hiring plant and labour from a company in which he has an interest.	Ongoing.

Roads Service has also received some complaints from 'aggrieved' contractors relating to the procurement of contracts, which have been the subject of investigations, however, details are not included in this answer as officials do not consider such individuals to be whistleblowers.

Rosscor Bridge, Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrading of Roscor Bridge in Fermanagh.
(AQW 19952/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service plans to lay a new skid resistant surface on the 'Bailey bridge' section at the northernmost span of Rosscor Bridge. In addition, it plans to attach steel mesh panels to the existing steel parapets to enhance pedestrian safety at this location. Roads Service anticipates this work will commence in April/May 2013.

Longer term plans for Rosscor Bridge include, replacement of the 'Bailey bridge' section with a reinforced concrete structure, and structural repairs to the existing reinforced concrete bridge. However, due to the high costs associated with this work, progression will be dependent upon special funding being made available, as the extent of these repairs is well beyond the scope of what can be achieved within current maintenance and bridge strengthening funding allocations.

Roads Service: Liability Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims have been made against Roads Service, in the last three financial years.
(AQW 20001/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of claims made against my Department's Roads Service, in each of the last three financial years, are detailed in the table below:

Year	Employer's Liability	Public Liability	Total
2009/2010	19	3,629	3,648
2010/2011	17	3,727	3,744
2011/2012	13	2,908	2,921

Final figures for the current financial year, 2012/2013, are not yet available.

A37 Road: Lane Improvements

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the progress that has been made in implementing lane improvements for overtaking on the A37 between Limavady and Coleraine.
(AQW 20019/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Planning for the Gortcorbies Climbing Lane scheme on the A37 is well advanced and my Department's Roads Service has now developed an environmentally friendly and cost effective design that is suitable for the attractive Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This addresses the earlier concerns about disposal of surplus material, arising from construction of the scheme.

At present, there is no provision in the 2011-2015 budget for construction of this scheme. Spending beyond the current budget period on schemes of this nature will depend on future budget settlements and consideration of the competing priorities.

Resident Parking Schemes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 19219/11-15, to list any areas where resident parking schemes have been refused because they do not meet his Department's criteria.
(AQW 20020/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The areas where Residents' Parking Schemes have been refused due to their not meeting criteria set down by my Department's Road Service are listed below:

- Riverside, Antrim;
- Victoria Street, Armagh;
- Cullybackey Road, Ballymena;
- James Street, Ballymena;
- Bushmills Road, Coleraine;
- Circular Road, Coleraine;
- Prospect Terrace, Dromore (Co. Down);
- Fairview Avenue, Enniskillen;
- Aberfoyle Crescent, Londonderry;
- Bond Street, Londonderry;
- Newry Street area, Markethill;
- Campsie Avenue, Omagh;
- Gallows Hill area, Omagh;
- Johnston Park, Omagh; and
- Alexander Terrace, Strabane.

Sewerage System: Millisle

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the latest spill of raw sewage at Millisle Beach Park, what steps will be taken to prioritise the installation of a new pumping station which NI Water had indicated would be in place by 2013.
(AQW 20271/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the out-of-sewer flooding was caused by heavy rainfall which overwhelmed the existing pumping station at the same time there was a collapse on the emergency overflow pipeline from the pumping station.

A £2.2 million capital project to upgrade the sewerage system in Millisle, in order to reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding within the area and to deliver improved bathing waters, is included in NIW's PC13 Business Plan covering the period April 2013 to March 2015. The project was programmed to be delivered in 2013 but has been delayed by the legal process associated with the acquisition of a site for the new pumping station. NIW is now in the process of negotiating with Ards Borough Council for a suitable site on Council land. When agreement has been reached, NIW will seek planning permission for the pumping station and the consent of Northern Ireland Environment Agency for construction of a new sea outfall pipeline. Subject to obtaining statutory approvals and the completion of lands acquisition, NIW will be seeking tenders in late 2013 with the view of construction commencing in Spring 2014 with completion approximately one year later.

Railways: Future Railway Investment Consultation

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for holding public meetings on the Future Railways Consultation document only in Belfast, Londonderry and Dungannon and not at locations along the Larne, Newry and Bangor routes.
(AQW 20327/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The public meetings were arranged to give people the opportunity to find out more about the costs and benefits of further railways investment and to hear views on how the strategic direction for capital expenditure should be prioritised. In order to facilitate as many people as possible participating in those events, the three locations for the Future Railway Investment consultation meetings were chosen to provide a reasonable geographical spread across Northern Ireland. However, my Department will consider any requests from interested parties to hold further meetings before the close of the consultation period on 12 April 2013.

Department for Social Development

Social Security Appeal Tribunals: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of social security benefit appeal hearings in North Down in each of the last five years, broken down by venue.
(AQW 19408/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The information cannot be provided in the format sought. However, the table below sets out the number of sessions convened by The Appeals Service (TAS) at the venues included in the Newtownards tribunal district for each of the last five financial years. TAS currently uses venues at Bangor Signal Centre, Ards Business Centre and Newtownards Courthouse. It also used Sketrick House until July2011.

	June 2007 to March 2008	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of sessions convened	145	317	333	353	352

Notes:

(1) The Appeals Service cannot provide information before June 2007.

(2) During the period June 2007-March 2008 appeals emanating from this area were also listed in Belfast.

(3) The Newtownards tribunal district includes venues at Newtownards and Bangor.

(4) The number of appeals within each session can vary and is dependent on the type of benefit involved, type of hearing requested (oral or on the papers) and complexity of appeal.

Social Housing: Newbuilds

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the locations of social housing new builds, in each of the last three financial years and in this year to date.
(AQW 19466/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The tables attached detail the locations of social housing new builds for the last three financial years and the year to date. It should be noted that the tables do not include “Off the Shelf” or “Rehabilitation units”.

Year	Number of New Builds
2009/10	1,243
2010/11	1,752
2011/12	984
2012/13 (year to date)	157

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Social Housing Development Programme: Starts – 2009/10

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Jamaica Street Phase 2, Belfast (T)	16	General Needs
Monagh Road Phase 2, Belfast (Travellers)	5	Travellers
43 Whitewell Road, Belfast	15	General Needs
Bass Brewery Site, Glen Road, Belfast	166	General Needs
100 Cliftonville Road, Belfast (ALP)	9	Cat 1 Elderly
36A - 38 Park Avenue, Belfast	20	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Tesco Site, Donegall Road, Belfast	31	General Needs
Tesco Site, Donegall Road, Belfast	40	General Needs
Roden Street Phase 2, Belfast (T)	43	General Needs
Ivan Street, Belfast	10	General Needs
St Patrick's Primary School, North Queen Street, Belfast (T)	28	General Needs
98 Whitewell Road, Belfast	8	Cat 1 Elderly
Shiels Street, Belfast (ALP)	6	General Needs
St Teresa's Site, Glen Road, Belfast	18	General Needs
Highway, Highfield Estate, Belfast (T)	1	General Needs
Carrick Hill/Library Street, Belfast (T)	11	General Needs
270-272 Falls Road, Belfast (Surplus Site)	10	General Needs
Ladas Way, Belfast (ALP)	16	General Needs
Grove Street East, Belfast	17	General Needs
Dunmisk Park Phase 2, Belfast	28	Cat 1 Elderly
Finaghy Road South, Belfast	12	General Needs
Charter Youth Club, Sandy Row,	3	General Needs
Eden Orlits, Phase 3A, Carrickfergus (T)	12	General Needs
51 Main Street, Crumlin	5	General Needs
Drumalla House, Carnlough (Surplus Site)	11	General Needs
Caherty Road, Broughshane	48	General Needs
Garryduff Gardens, Ballymena Road, Ballymoney	5	Learning Disabilities
Drumawill Phase 1, Enniskillen	34	General Needs
Enniskillen EMI	30	Frail Elderly/Dementia
Crossmaglen Phase 4 (T)	18	General Needs
Old Warrenpoint Road, Newry	26	General Needs
Carrowshee Park, Lisnaskea (T)	19	General Needs
Thomas Street, Portadown	15	Mental Health
Beechgrove Phase 2, Dromore (T)	5	General Needs
Ennis Green, Lurgan (T)	7	General Needs
Prince's Close / Street, Craigavon	4	General Needs
Killough Road, Downpatrick (T)	19	General Needs
Rosevale Avenue, Newtownards	15	General Needs
Upper North Street, Newtownards	31	General Needs
Dunsy Way, Comber (Council Site) (T)	33	General Needs
The Brae, Ballygowan	14	General Needs
Regent Street, Newtownards	43	General Needs
Rathgill Zone 1, Bangor (T)	28	General Needs
6-12 Breda Park, Newtownbreda (Surplus Site)	34	General Needs/Cat 1 Elderly
Central Avenue, Bangor	47	Cat 1 Elderly
PSNI Site, Newcastle Road, Castlewellan, (Surplus Site)	6	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Gibson's Lane, Bangor	17	General Needs
Strand Avenue, Holywood (T)	19	General Needs/ Cat 1 Elderly
21 Ashley Park, Dunmurry	8	Cat 1 Elderly
Appletree House, Bridge Street, Downpatrick	24	Cat 3 Frail Elderly
PSNI Site, Rosemount, Londonderry (T) (Surplus Site)	17	General Needs
West Bank, Londonderry	124	General Needs
Coolnagard, Omagh (Challenging Behaviour)	12	Learning Disabilities
Total Dwellings	**1243**	**Total Schemes**

Social Housing Development Programme: Starts – 2010/11

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
314 Ravenhill Road, Belfast	67	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Rosapenna Parade, Belfast	2	General Needs
1a - 5 Upper Suffolk Road, Belfast	14	General Needs
2A Cherryville Street, Belfast (T)	11	Cat 1 Elderly
Boiler House Site Stewart Street,	16	General Needs
32 Whiterock Road / Whiterock Grove,	7	General Needs
North Infill Hatfield Street, Belfast (T)	4	General Needs
155 Glen Road, Belfast	15	Cat 1 Elderly
Gainsborough Infill, Belfast (T)	17	General Needs
North Rugby Club Grounds Phase 3, Belfast	42	General Needs
Sunningdale Gardens, Belfast (T)	46	General Needs/ Cat 1 Elderly
100 Holywood Road, Belfast	16	General Needs
2 Sunnyside Drive, Belfast (T)	2	General Needs
Prospect Park, Belfast	2	General Needs
Ladbrook Drive, Belfast	1	General Needs
Brookfield Mill, Belfast	40	General Needs
Lawnbrook URA, Belfast (T)	26	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Alliance Avenue, Belfast (T)	4	General Needs
Lands at Oldpark Avenue	3	General Needs
Loughview Terrace, Belfast (T)	9	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Shankill House Replacement, Belfast (T)	35	Cat 3 Frail Elderly
Lily Bar, Sandy Row, Belfast (T)	18	General Needs
Ormeau Embankment, Belfast	47	General Needs
Boundary Way, Belfast	12	General Needs
The Glen, Limestone Road	24	General Needs
Stanhope Street Phase 2, Belfast (T)	11	General Needs
Factory Site, Alliance Avenue, Belfast	29	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Hosford House / Skanios, Belfast	31	Homeless/Supported
186 Cliftonpark Avenue, Belfast	8	General Needs
Holywood Road, Belfast	19	General Needs
Tudor Phase 4, Belfast (T)	11	General Needs
St Anthony's Church, Willowfield	16	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Darkfort Drive Phase 1, Portballintrae (T)	6	General Needs
Rathcoole Gardens, Newtownabbey (T)	28	Cat 1 Elderly
Garvaghy Crescent Phase 1, Portglenone (T)	16	General Needs
Templepatrick Library Site, Templepatrick (Surplus Site)	2	General Needs
Neilsbrook, Randalstown (T)	25	General Needs
Springfarm Phase 2, Antrim	8	General Needs
Monkstown Gardens, Newtownabbey	6	Cat 1 Elderly
Cunningham Way, Antrim	12	General Needs
Rashee Drive/Ballycorr Rd, Ballyclare (T)	15	General Needs
Mount Street / High Street, Bawnmore (T)	4	General Needs
1 Doagh Road, Newtownabbey	13	Cat 1 Elderly
Ballyduff Primary School, Newtownabbey (Surplus Site)	20	General Needs
466 Shore Road, Newtownabbey	6	General Needs/ Complex Needs
PSNI Site, Lisbellaw (Surplus Site)	12	General Needs
Site rear of Derrybeg Villas, Newry (Surplus Site)	2	General Needs
Orchard Park, Aughnacloy (T)	15	General Needs
Granville Primary School, Derryveen, Dungannon (ALP) (Surplus Site)	32	General Needs
PSNI Cullion Road, Tempo (Surplus Site)	4	General Needs
Martins Lane, Newry (Surplus Site)	6	General Needs
Prospect Way, North Lurgan (T)	5	General Needs
Derrymacash, Craigavon (T)	14	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Mullacreevie Phase 1, Armagh (T)	21	General Needs
Newtowncloghogue (T)	22	General Needs
Lisnahull Road, Dungannon (T) (PassivHaus mini competition)	5	General Needs
Gullion View, Meigh (T)	10	General Needs
Adrian Heights, Donagh, Fermanagh	5	General Needs
Annaghdale Place & Garvaghy Road, Portadown & Rectory Road, Lurgan	4	Physical Disabilities
Ennis Green Phase 2, Lurgan (T)	8	General Needs
Greenfield Park, Newry (T)	2	General Needs
Derrybeg Small Sites, Newry (T)	11	General Needs / Cat 1 Elderly
Woodside Park, Loughbrickland (T)	24	General Needs
Main Street PSNI, Middletown (Surplus Site)	12	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Ardmore Drive, Hilltown (T)	8	General Needs
Weir Court, Comber	15	Cat 1 Elderly
Blenheim Drive, Newtownards (T)	15	General Needs
Castlewellan Road, Phase 1, Newcastle	130	General Needs
Moss Road, Millisle	10	General Needs
Crewhill Gardens, Ardglass (ALP) (T)	26	General Needs
Summerhill Road, Twinbrook (T)	14	General Needs
73 Bangor Road, Newtownards	4	General Needs
51 Newtownards Road, Comber (T)	12	General Needs
8-12 Reaville Park, Dundonald	12	General Needs
Drumaness Road, Drumaness (ALP)	12	General Needs / Cat 1 Elderly
Lagmore Phase 7, Poleglass (T)	37	General Needs
Tirowen Drive, Knockmore, Lisburn (T)	6	General Needs
Killaney Avenue, Old Warren, Lisburn (T)	20	General Needs
Church Avenue, Kircubbin	7	General Needs
22 - 24 Comber Road, Dundonald	18	General Needs
Nettlehill Road, Lisburn (ALP)	21	Cat 1 Elderly
Ballymacoss Hill Phase 1, Lisburn (T)	146	General Needs
Buncrana Road, Londonderry	67	General Needs
Apex Housing Rural Cottages Phase 8 (T)	1	General Needs
Apex Housing Rural Cottages Phase 8 (T)	1	General Needs
Apex Housing Rural Cottages Phase 8 (T)	1	General Needs
Desmonds Factory Site, Magherafelt	30	General Needs/ Complex Needs
Iona House Phase 1, Strabane	12	Learning Disabilities
Circular Road Phase 1, Londonderry (T)	67	General Needs
42-45 Fergleen Park, Londonderry (T)	6	General Needs
Apex Housing Rural Cottages Phase 8 (T)	1	General Needs
Bligh's Lane, United Technologies	61	General Needs
Site, Londonderry		
Loughrey Terrace, Drumquin (T)	2	General Needs
PSNI Melmount Road, Sion Mills (Surplus Site)	6	General Needs
Newtownstewart (Forthill Park) (T)	4	Complex Needs
Total Dwellings	**1752**	**Total Schemes**

Social Housing Development Programme: Starts – 2011/12

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
212 Cliftonville Road, Belfast	10	General Needs
Ballymacarrett Library Site, Templemore Avenue Belfast (Surplus Site)	4	General Needs
Andersonstown Social Security Office, Slieveban Drive, Belfast (Surplus Site)	25	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Andersonstown Library Site, Belfast, (Surplus Site)	4	General Needs
Clara Street, Belfast	22	General Needs
Mountpottinger PSNI, Belfast (Surplus Site)	10	General Needs
Tiger's Bay / Limestone Road, Rehabs, Belfast (T)	10	General Needs
2 Allworthy Avenue, Belfast	3	General Needs
North Rugby Club, Belfast Phase 4	8	General Needs
Village URA Phase 2, Belfast (T)	50	General Needs/
Village URA Phase 1, Belfast (T)	37	General Needs/
Ross Street Flats, Belfast (T)	12	General Needs
1-39 Leopold Street, Belfast	10	General Needs
Thompson House, Belfast	4	Ex-offenders
167 Andersonstown Road, Belfast	11	Cat 1 Elderly
Coulters Site Antrim Road, Belfast (T)	10	General Needs
Mill Court Phase 2, Falls Road, Belfast	24	Cat 1 Elderly
Blackmountain Bungalows Phase 2A, Belfast (T)	2	Physically Disabled
142 -144 Clifton Park Avenue, Belfast (T)	6	General Needs
91 - 97 Inverary Avenue, Belfast	14	General Needs
Brookfield Gardens, Ahoghill (T)	9	General Needs/
Church Bay, Rathlin Island	10	General Needs
Rush Park, Newtownabbey	17	General Needs/
Brook Street Library Site, Ahoghill (Surplus Site)	6	General Needs
27 - 33 Queen Street, Ballymena	14	Cat 1 Elderly
Ards Drive, Monkstown (T)	12	General Needs
Tobar Park, Cullybackey (T)	17	General Needs
Eden Phase 3B, Carrrickfergus (T)	22	General Needs
Fenton Park, Cloughmills (T)	6	General Needs
PSNI Site, Ferniskey Road, Kells (Surplus Site)	6	General Needs
Lerwill House, Coleraine	14	Learning Disabilities
Mullaghacall Road, Portstewart (T)	1	Physical Disabilities
Cloneen, Dungannon	48	General Needs
3a The Square, Brick Row, Moy	7	General Needs
Rathkellan Park, Crossmaglen (T)	1	General Needs
Newtown Villas, Rostrevor (T)	2	General Needs
Rectory Close, Loughgall (T)	6	General Needs
Longstone Road, Annalong	6	General Needs
Glen View, Rathfriland (T)	2	General Needs
Ardmore Road, Phase 1, Armagh (T)	26	General Needs
Millview, Richill, Armagh (T)	6	General Needs
Springhill Drive, Newry (T)	6	General Needs
Coolmillish Road, Markethill (T)	8	General Needs
254 Kingsway, Dunmurry	27	General Needs

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Loch Cuan, Newtownards Replacement/Ward House	34	Cat 3 Frail Elderly/ Learning
Castlewellan Road, Phase 2, Newcastle	16	General Needs
St Patrick's Road Raholp, Downpatrick	8	General Needs
Bloomfield Road/South Circular Road Bangor (T)	37	General Needs
68 Lower Braniel Road, Castlereagh	15	Cat 1 Elderly
41 Movilla Street, Newtownards (T) (Includes 43 Movilla St Surplus Site)	12	Cat 1 Elderly
Hillhall Road Primary School, Lisburn (Surplus Site)	19	General Needs/
Mitchells GAA, Poleglass	65	General Needs/Physical
Grahamsbridge Road (T)	1	Physical Disabilities
Crossbill Place, Pond Park (infill), Lisburn	10	General Needs
Primacy Road, Bangor	13	General Needs
188-190 Lower Braniel Road, Castlereagh (T)	11	General Needs/Physical
Glenbrook Road, Newtownards (T)	10	General Needs
Craigmore Road, Maghera	12	General Needs
Circular Road, Phase 3, Londonderry	72	General Needs
Hass Road, Dungiven (T)	10	General Needs
Marian Hall, Londonderry (ALP)	24	General Needs
Tamlough Park, Ballykelly (T)	13	General Needs/
Circular Road Phase 2, Londonderry (T)	41	General Needs
McGurks Villas, Gulladuff, Maghera (T)	6	General Needs
Total Dwellings	**984**	**Total Schemes**

Social Housing Development Programme: Starts - 2012/13

Scheme Name	Dwellings	Client Group
Springfield Crescent, Belfast	9	General Needs
Arundel Replacement, Belfast (T)	8	General Needs
Parkside URA, Limestone Road Belfast (T)	36	General Needs
73 Islay Street, Antrim (Springfarm Phase 3)	1	General Needs
Todd Close, Phase 2 (Oriel Replacement)	5	Learning Disabilities
Ballaghmore Heights Backlands, Enniskillen	14	General Needs
Father Cullen Park, Bessbrook, Newry (T)	62	General Needs/ Travellers
School Road (MOD/PSNI site), Forkhill (Surplus Site)	10	General Needs
The Heathers Replacement, Phase 3	5	Learning Disabilities
Rectory Close Extension, Loughgall (T)	2	General Needs
Knockbracken PSNI Site, Saintfield Road	2	Physical Disabilities
Ashleywood House, Phase 2	3	Vulnerable Women
Total Dwellings	**157**	**Total Schemes**

Ballycastle Strategic Town Development and Action Plan

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the implementation of each of the 33 recommendations in the Ballycastle town Masterplan.
(AQW 19798/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Ballycastle Strategic Town Development and Action Plan published in April 2009 is a long term strategy lasting up to 15 years. This work was commissioned by my Department and produced in partnership with Moyle District Council. Responsibility for the implementation of the individual actions set out in the strategy rests with the relevant stakeholders, including the private sector and public bodies including Government Departments and other statutory agencies. The strategy covers a wide range of regeneration actions to realise the full social, economic and environmental potential of the town.

One of the earliest actions completed in the Strategy was establishing a new town centre partnership to co-ordinate its delivery. This partnership comprises members from Ballycastle Chamber of Commerce, Councillors, and public sector agencies including DSD. To date the work completed includes four actions on the organisational structures and three actions for environmental improvements on gateway signs, a town trail and a river walk. These schemes have been funded by DSD, NITB and Moyle District Council.

My Department will continue to work with Ballycastle Town Partnership and Moyle District Council to assist where possible in the delivery of the other initiatives in the town strategy.

Town Centre Properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what grants are available to tidy up shop fronts for empty or run down business premises.
(AQW 19828/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department's Urban Development Grant scheme is targeted at bringing derelict or vacant Town Centre properties back into productive use and at enhancing the commercial viability of existing properties. Owners of eligible properties in specific priority urban areas can apply to the Department for grant aid.

My Department has also provided funding for seven pilot ReStore projects in Belfast, Londonderry, Larne and Lurgan over the past four years. The greater part of the funding was allocated towards enhancing shop fronts of existing businesses. This scheme is currently being evaluated.

In addition, my Department, in conjunction with district councils and traders forums, has undertaken a programme of revitalisation schemes designed to refresh local business premises in town centres. The schemes undertake a number of approaches designed to make town centres more attractive to shoppers, including painting shop fronts and providing new signage where appropriate. To date, 17 regional towns and cities have availed of these schemes, with schemes due to commence in another 14 towns by March 2015.

Housing Executive: Decent Homes Standard Plus

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of suggestions that the Housing Executive stock is one of the best in Western Europe, to detail the calculation used to arrive at the figure of £1billion needed to bring the stock up to standard.
(AQW 19830/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advise that the £1 billion figure is taken from the Housing Executive's Maintenance Investment Strategy. It was estimated that £945.3 million would be required for the following five years in order to maintain progress and to meet 'Decent Homes Standard Plus' by 2021.

The figure comprises:

- £673.3 million to meet/maintain Decent Homes Standard (DHS) Plus, as defined by Savills;
- £110.1 million for what were deemed essential landlord costs that had not been included by Savills; for example: Fire Doors, general maintenance, estate infrastructure works, anticipated demolitions etc;
- £51.8 million for Disabled Persons Adaptations;
- £110.1 million for what were deemed desirable (albeit non-essential) works that had not been included by Savills; for example: replacement of Economy 7 heating; upgrading to double glazing; cladding for multi-storey blocks; and environmental improvements.

Housing Executive: Financial Responsibilities

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development why it is not considered best practice for the Housing Executive to have responsibility for its own borrowing, investment, financial and accounting duties.
(AQW 19831/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive's Accounting All Government Departments including their Agencies, NDPB's, Public Corporations and Arm Length Bodies are governed by HM Treasury rules and should operate within the broad framework established by HM Treasury.

In Northern Ireland, Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) is the guidance issued by DFP which relates mainly to the proper handling and reporting of public money and the main principals for dealing with resources used by public sector organisations in Northern Ireland.

Officer must ensure that his organisations' activities achieve high and reliable standards of regularity and propriety as laid down in HM Treasury guidelines.

As part of the public sector the Housing Executive's responsibilities for borrowing, investment, financial and accounting duties are governed by HM Treasury rules and MPMNI guidance.

Social Housing: Double Glazing

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the timeframes for the replacement and installation of double glazed windows in Housing Executive properties in Donaghadee.
(AQW 19849/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that it has a double glazing scheme on site for the Ards Peninsula, which includes 59 properties in Donaghadee. The contractor started in Portaferry, is working up through the Peninsula, and should be starting work in Donaghadee in approximately four to five weeks time, which should complete double glazing installation in Donaghadee.

Social Housing: Double Glazing

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the timeframes for the replacement and installation of double glazed windows in Housing Executive properties in Millisle.
(AQW 19851/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that there are no double glazing installations programmed for Millisle, as all their properties in the village have already been double glazed through previous External Cyclical Maintenance schemes.

Home Insulation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development what was the cost of the insulation supplied to households through Warm Homes on the Area Based Approach pilot compared to the insulation price for households not qualifying under Warm Homes.
(AQW 19884/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not possible to directly compare the costs associated with the two schemes without making assumptions about the nature of the work, the location of the properties and the size of the dwelling. However, on an indicative basis, assuming 200mm of insulation for an 80 m² loft, the figures are as follows:

1) With soffit Vents
   Warm Homes: £8.70 per m²
   Affordable Warmth: £9.60 per m²

2) With Slate Vents
   Warm Homes: £14.22 per m²
   Affordable Warmth: £12.75 per m²

3) With Tile Vents
   Warm Homes: £12.88 per m²
   Affordable Warmth: £12.00 per m²

These figures should be taken as indicative only because of the complexities involved.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) the number of queries to the Boiler Replacement Scheme since the scheme was launched; (ii) the number of jobs completed; (iii) the target number of jobs which would have been expected to be completed at this stage; and (iv) for a breakdown of the types of replacement, such as oil to oil, oil to gas, or oil to renewable.
(AQW 19885/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since the Boiler Replacement Scheme was launched in September 2012:

- 28,223 queries have been received;
- 9,992 completed applications forms have been received;
- 4,908 approvals have been issued;

- 1,348 boiler replacements have been completed;
- 1,051 oil to oil replacements have been completed;
- 297 conversions to gas have been completed.

The number of boiler completions at any time depends on the response times of the applicants. Over the Christmas period and in to January 2013 it is to be expected that there will less installations. From February 2013 onwards it is reasonable to expect that the number of installations will increase as at present. The number of completions to date is consistent with a reasonable response time from applicants coupled with the time of year.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Youth Groups and Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what grants are available for setting up youth groups and projects.
(AQW 19887/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Within my Department there are no specific funding programmes for setting up youth groups and projects. However as previously advised there are a number of Programmes accessible to young people, these include the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme and the Volunteering Small Grants Programme.

Funding through the above Programmes may be made available for setting up youth groups and supporting projects where a priority need has been identified and resources can be made available.

Social Housing: Rent Increases in Rinmore Drive, Creggan

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the rent increase for tenants of properties in Rinmore Drive, Derry since the transfer of the properties to Apex Housing Association.
(AQW 19896/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There was a total of 55 houses in Rinmore Drive, Creggan that transferred from the NIHE to Apex Housing Association. Of the 55 properties, 14 have had improvements completed with the rent charge increasing accordingly, 4 are currently undergoing improvements and the rent charge has not changed at this stage. Improvements to the remaining 37 properties have not yet commenced and the rent charge has also not changed.

The table below details the properties that have had improvements carried out with the amount charged in rent shown before and after improvements

Rinmore Drive

Reimproved Properties

Number	Improved Property Current Rent Charge £	Umimproved Previous Rent Charge £	
1	73.60	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
3	71.76	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
5	69.92	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
7	71.76	54.39	charges increased 04/06/12
9	71.76	54.39	charges increased 11/06/12
11	71.76	54.39	charges increased 11/06/12
13	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
15	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
17	69.92	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
19			
21	71.76	54.39	charges increased 29/10/12
23			
25	69.92	54.39	charges increased 05/11/12
27	69.92	54.39	charges increased 05/11/12
29	71.76	54.39	charges increased 19/11/12

Number	Improved Property Current Rent Charge £	Umimproved Previous Rent Charge £	
31	71.76	54.39	charges increased 19/11/12

Reimprovement works not yet complete

Number	Current Rent Charge £	Previous Rent Charge £
33	54.39	54.39
35	54.39	54.39
37	54.39	54.39
39	54.39	54.39

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy, Foyle Area

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many people or families are at risk of financial penalty for under-occupation in each district within the Foyle Constituency.
(AQW 20015/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary Constituency.

However, the Housing Executive estimates that within its District Office areas of Waterloo Place, Waterside and Collon Terrace, the number of cases at risk of financial penalty for under-occupation is 3,364. This information is drawn from Housing Benefit claimants affected which includes families, couples and single people.

Emigration

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development whether levels of emigration impacts on his departmental budget.
(AQW 20034/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department's main business areas are social security (including child maintenance & enforcement), housing and urban regeneration/community development. As such, emigration, which by implication could potentially reduce the demand for these services, is not factored into departmental budgetary considerations.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy, North Belfast Constituency

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development how many people or families are at risk of financial penalty for under-occupation in the North Belfast constituency.
(AQW 20050/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary Constituency.

However, the Housing Executive estimates that within its District Office areas of North Belfast, Newtownabbey 1 and Newtownabbey 2, the number of cases at risk of financial penalty for under-occupation is 4,160. This information is drawn from Housing Benefit claimants affected which includes families, couples and single people.

Volunteering Strategy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development when he will make a decision on the volunteering infrastructure.
(AQW 20203/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to ensuring effective infrastructure support for volunteering in order to successfully deliver on Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy. My Department is presently considering delivery options for such support and I expect new arrangements to be put in place later this year. In the interim period arrangements are being developed by my officials to ensure the continued support for volunteering.

Volunteering Strategy

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will grant an extension on the volunteering funding package.
(AQW 20204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am committed to ensuring effective infrastructure support for volunteering in order to successfully deliver on Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy. My Department is presently considering delivery options for such support and I expect new arrangements to be put in place later this year. In the interim period arrangements are being developed by my officials to ensure the continued support for volunteering.

Advice Services Transition Fund

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Advice Sector in Northern Ireland will be able to avail of the £65 million Advice Services Transition Fund that was created by the Cabinet Office and The Big Lottery Fund.
(AQW 20226/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The £65m for Free Advice Services announced by the Cabinet Office on 26 October 2012 represents a mix of existing public spend and Big Lottery funding for advice services in England only.

However my Department provides funding of approx £4.5m per annum for a range of advice provision, including regional advice support, frontline advice support, housing advice and advice supporting benefit uptake.

Northern Ireland
Assembly

Friday 8 March 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will publish any market research carried out on the location of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the Maze site; and which other locations were considered or tested.
(AQW 18905/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre is being built at Maze/Long Kesh in accordance with Recommendation 3.3.12 of the All-party Maze Consultation Panel Report (February 2005).

The Maze Consultation Panel Report "A new future for the Maze/Long Kesh" 24 February 2005 recommended that the Government should commit immediately to the design and construction of a major new conflict transformation facility specified to the highest architectural standards appropriate to an international centre of expertise, and embracing iconic art elements in the specification sufficient to signify the major political and social investment in promoting peace and prosperity and the transformation of society.

Maze Consultation Panel Membership:
Political Nominees

David Campbell, Chair (UUP)
Michael McKernan, Vice Chair (SDLP)
Roy Bailie, UUP nominee
Gerry Cosgrove, SDLP nominee
Mairtin O'Muilleoir SF nominee
Edwin Poots, DUP nominee

Extensive consultations take place on an ongoing basis with many stakeholder groups, reference groups and local residents to obtain how their needs may best be met on the site.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Measuring Poverty

Ms Lo asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have met with the Rowntree Foundation to discuss the issue of measuring poverty and to learn from other jurisdictions.
(AQW 19523/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not met with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to discuss measuring poverty. However, officials, along with colleagues from other departments, have met with JRF in relation to the development of the longer term approach to the Delivering Social Change (DSC) framework. This framework has been established by the Executive to achieve a sustained reduction in poverty and disadvantage.

Officials will continue to keep in contact with JRF to monitor its work on a UK anti-poverty strategy and to exchange ideas and information as the Programme for Government work on tackling disadvantage progresses.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the consultation on the childcare strategy, (i) what engagement has taken place with employers on their inclusion in providing solutions to childcare for employees; (ii) what assessment has been made of the benefits to businesses from providing childcare support for employees; (iii) how businesses can be incentivised to provide childcare solutions to their employees; and (iv) whether they have considered introducing regulations which would require some employers to provide childcare.
(AQW 19786/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Public consultation on the Childcare Strategy is underway. It is an opportunity for all with an interest in childcare, including employers and employers' groups, to put forward proposals to inform and shape the final Strategy. The Department has been accepting written submissions since the start of the consultation on 5 December 2012 and public consultation events, which began on 20 February, will provide a further opportunity for direct engagement in the Strategy's development. All proposals for the future Strategy are welcome and will be taken fully into account. In parallel to public consultation, research is being undertaken to identify and critically assess options, including those put forward during consultation, for potential intervention in the childcare sector.

Ebrington Barracks

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the construction of an underground car park at Ebrington Barracks.
(AQW 19962/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The tender for the construction of a car park and enabling platform at Ebrington closed in December 2013 and a contractor has been appointed. It is expected that work on the project will commence in March 2013.

Child Poverty

Dr McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to bring forward any new initiatives to tackle child poverty.
(AQO 3409/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Child Poverty Strategy, which was agreed by the Executive in March 2011, continues to inform and steer the actions that are being taken forward by all departments in fulfilment of their obligations under the Child Poverty Act 2010. The second annual report on the delivery of the Child Poverty Strategy is due to be laid before the Assembly by the end of March.

Under the Delivering Social Change framework, we are aiming to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages, as well as improving the health, wellbeing and life opportunities of our children and young people.

The early work taken forward under the framework is focusing on the needs of children and families in order to ensure that the most urgent and significant problems in our society are addressed, including deprivation, social exclusion and disadvantage.

In line with this initial focus, we recently agreed a Children and Young Persons Early Action Document which identifies key priorities to be taken forward over the coming years. The initial six Signature Programmes which we announced on 10 October 2012 have been designed to address some of the key priorities identified within the Early Action Document.

We are keen that further such programmes are identified as a rolling programme of initiatives and are currently giving consideration to a range of possible future signature programmes for a second phase of work to be taken forward. This may include the development of further interventions to specifically tackle the issue of child poverty.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Victims and Survivors service.
(AQO 3410/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service, which opened in April 2012, aims to provide a high quality service to victims and survivors based on individual assessed needs and the provision of high quality services to meet these needs through the funding of Victims' groups, the direct commissioning of interventions and financial assistance to individuals in difficulty.

The Service is committed to ensuring that, through the individual assessment process, victims are made aware of the full range of services appropriate to their needs. The aim is to empower victims and survivors, introducing them to organisations and locations where they can avail of appropriate and effective treatment and/or support tailored to their specific needs. The Service has conducted nearly 300 assessments to date.

Additionally, the Service is in the final stages of completing the assessment of more than 50 applications from groups for funding from the Victim Support Programme 2013-15. This programme will enable groups to provide a wide range of health and wellbeing and social support services directly to victims and survivors in need of help and assistance.

Once the necessary final pre-contract checks have been completed, the Service anticipates that Letters of Offer will be issued to successful groups from March 2013.

Delivering Social Change Framework

Ms McCorley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they plan to bring forward any further Delivering Social Change Signature Projects in the future.
(AQO 3411/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The early work taken forward under the Delivering Social Change Framework is focusing on the needs of children and families in order to ensure that the most urgent and significant problems in our society are addressed – problems such as poor educational outcomes, poor physical and mental health, economic activity, social exclusion and disadvantage.

In line with this initial focus, we recently agreed a Children and Young Persons Early Action Document which identifies key priorities to be taken forward over the coming years. The initial six Signature Programmes we announced on 10 October 2012 were designed to address some of the key priorities identified within the Early Action Document.

The Delivering Social Change Framework aims to reduce poverty and associated issues across all ages, and so whilst this initial focus is on the needs of our children and young people through the delivery of these six Signature Programmes, its longer term objective is to lay the basis for sustained social improvement for all our vulnerable groups. We are therefore keen that further such programmes are identified as a rolling programme of initiatives and are currently giving consideration to a number of possible future signature programmes for a second phase of work to be taken forward.

Family Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what actions they have taken, or intend to take, to address the financial shortfalls facing the Family Fund, given their role in co-ordinating disability issues.
(AQW 20030/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Family Fund is supported financially by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. Decisions about the allocation of resources to the Fund rest with Minister Poots.

Our Department has co-ordinated the delivery of a new Disability Strategy which will place the rights of people with disabilities firmly in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Under the Strategy, the Executive is committed to reducing poverty among people with disabilities and their families and to protecting their right to an adequate standard of living. Ministers from all relevant departments will be reporting through the Delivering Social Change framework on the progress they are making towards achieving that goal.

Childcare Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what criteria were set for Departments to bid for the £12m funding ring-fenced for childcare.
(AQW 20031/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive has allocated £12 million over the current Comprehensive Spending Review period to support the development of the Childcare Strategy.

In bidding for a share of the Fund, departments must demonstrate that their proposal contributes to the development of childcare and that it is additional to existing baseline provision for the delivery of childcare services.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the bids received for the funding set aside for the Social Protection Fund; (ii) to outline the process that Departments must follow to submit a bid; and (iii) how their Department is addressing the immediate requirements of people who may need to avail of this funding.
(AQW 20090/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer you to the answers in AQW 18548/11-15 and AQW 19590/11-15 dated 24 January and 14 February respectively.

Childcare Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 19221/11-15, what mechanism will be used to distribute the remaining money in the Childcare Fund; and will it be opened up for non-government organisations to apply.
(AQW 20174/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: At present, the Executive Childcare Fund is open to bids from Government Departments only. However, these departments can and do bid for funding that ultimately could be delivered to non-governmental organisations or they could bid for a scheme for non-governmental organisations to apply to. A decision on how to proceed with the Fund over its remaining years 2013/14 and 2014/15 will be taken during the development of the Childcare Strategy. This will allow the deployment of the remaining money in the Childcare Fund to align with the emerging priorities of the Strategy.

Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many residential bedrooms will be constructed as part of the Conflict Transformation facility at the Maze.
(AQW 20224/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The planned facilities at the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre currently include shared office space along with conference and meeting facilities that can be utilised by local and visiting groups to help further the aims and objectives of organisations working in this important sector. The plans do not include residential bedrooms at this stage.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Horse Meat in Beef Products

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures she is putting in place to ensure that there is no recurrence of the contamination of beef with horsemeat.
(AQW 18685/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The Food Standards Agency (FSA in NI) is the central competent authority in matters of food safety and authenticity here. DARD is the competent authority in NI for the Beef Labelling Regulations.

All slaughter premises here (including the facility that formerly slaughtered equines) are staffed by DARD veterinarians and Meat Inspectors. DARD staff are present at all times when slaughter is occurring, to ensure the Food Business Operators' compliance with public health legislation and traceability. Local cutting premises are subject to regular, risk-based audit by DARD vets, for the same purposes.

These activities are governed by a Service Level Agreement with the FSA in NI. Senior officials from DARD and FSA maintain regular formal and informal contact to ensure consistent and effective delivery to the agreed standard, and the FSA performs regular checks and independent audits to ensure the quality of work delivered on its behalf.

These measures have proven effective with to date no reports from the FSA of any finding of horse cross contamination or carryover connected to any of the local slaughter plants.

In response to the recent findings, and current concerns, however, the FSA has developed a 4 point action plan which is being implemented in conjunction with the food industry and other government departments (including DARD) here and across Britain.

In addition to the FSA's food authenticity survey of processed meat products, I asked the FSA (NI) to urgently begin an enhanced programme of inspections in cold stores, and in other meat processing establishments, across the north. This enhanced regime commenced on 6 February and will sit alongside the wider sampling survey.

As part of this, DARD officials have also initiated a series of enhanced checks and inspections in all the red meat slaughter and cutting premises for which it is the FSA's delivery agent. My officials are also working closely with the FSA to ensure that public confidence in beef from animals that have been born, raised and slaughtered here is maintained.

The purpose of this enhanced programme of inspections is to establish the sources of incoming meat ingredients to each establishment and assure that consumers' interests are being protected in relation to the declaration of the meat species in the establishments' products, and the precautions adopted by manufacturers to reduce or eliminate unintended inclusion of low levels of species that are not declared.

Consideration will be given by my officials as to what further actions are appropriate and proportionate, when the investigations under way are complete.

Halal Meat Products

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what legislation exists in relation to the processing, sale and distribution of Halal meat products; and how such processes are inspected.
(AQW 19660/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Food Standards Agency in the north is the central competent authority in matters of food safety, composition and labelling of food offered for human consumption. The statutory rules and regulations that apply to traditional meat and meat products also apply in relation to processing, sale and distribution of meat and meat products described as Halal. In relation to hygiene, processing, authenticity, labelling, sales and distribution, the Food Safety Order 1991 and subordinate legislation apply.

In relation to the welfare of animals, the method of slaughter for the provision of Halal meat is controlled by DARD under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1996.

All meat placed on the market is produced in accordance with EU food hygiene legislation and is inspected to the same standard.

Enforcement of food safety, food composition and labelling requirements are conducted by Council Environmental Health Officers who carry out hygiene and food standards inspections. Each food business is registered on a premises database and assigned a risk rating to facilitate a programme of inspections/interventions. The scope of hygiene and food standards inspections/interventions is set out in the Food Law Code of Practice and the Practice Guidance.

All slaughter premises here are staffed by DARD Veterinarians and Meat Inspectors. DARD staff are present at all times when slaughter is occurring to ensure the Food Business Operators' compliance with public health and animal welfare legislation and traceability. Local cutting premises are subject to regular, risk-based audits by DARD vets, for the same purposes.

These activities are governed by a Service Level Agreement with the FSA in the north. Senior officials from DARD and the FSA maintain regular formal and informal contact to ensure consistent and effective delivery to the agreed standard, and the FSA performs regular checks and independent audits to ensure the quality of the work delivered on its behalf.

Under the Beef and Veal Labelling Regulations 2010 there is a requirement for any non-compulsory labelling information regarding the characteristics of the meat, such as method of production or breed, to be approved as a voluntary claim. This would include claims for Halal beef. These Regulations apply to fresh and frozen beef and veal but not processed products. All voluntary claims must be approved by DARD, following verification by an independent verifier. These claims are checked during DARD beef labelling inspections and independently verified on an annual basis.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DARD Meetings with DEFRA

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the interaction her Department has had with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs with regard to tackling the horse meat scandal.
(AQW 19662/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DEFRA is responsible for matters of food authenticity in England and Wales, while the FSA has this responsibility in Scotland and here.

FSA is responsible for Food Safety in all areas of the country.

As the current issue is primarily one of authenticity rather than safety, DARD officials have been in regular contact with officials from the FSA (NI) with whom responsibility for both authenticity and food safety here rests.

I have participated in tele-conferences with the Defra Ministers and Devolved Administrations on 3 occasions, and most recently in Brussels on 25th February when possible improvements to horse traceability, extension of DNA testing regimes, and the acceleration for enhanced Country-of-origin labelling proposals were discussed.

DARD officials have also contributed to the development of an Action Plan with FSA and Defra.

DARD: Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the process used to decide whether the Central Investigation Service will proceed with a fraud investigation case.
(AQW 19746/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Cases of suspected fraud referred to the Central Investigation Service (CIS) for investigation are immediately registered on the CIS database and reported to the NIAO.

The Head of Central Investigation Service (HCIS) is responsible for reviewing all suspected fraud case referrals and assessing whether or not they merit investigation. While all case referrals merit consideration for investigation, the circumstances of each case will differ and, therefore, each must be considered on its own merits. The HCIS considers a broad range of factors as detailed in the CIS Procedures Manual.

If the HCIS identifies any significant issues of concern, and where it is proposed to not to proceed to fraud investigation, the views of the Head of Branch and the Investigation Officers (IO) will always be sought.

After deliberations the case will either proceed to fraud investigation or the case will be assessed and returned to the relevant business area with the rationale for closure and appropriate recommendations regarding redress.

The CIS Procedures Manual contains policies, procedures and aide memoires for staff reference and adherence, where applicable.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to ongoing Bovine Viral Diarrhoea schemes, what plans her Department has to incentivise farmers to efficiently dispose of infected persistent infection calves rather than allow them to return to the herd.
(AQW 19971/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At farm level, production diseases such as BVD and Johne's Disease can have a significant impact on productivity. Such diseases are not subject to national control programmes and because their impacts are mainly at farm level, it is the responsibility of industry to take the lead in tackling them.

I therefore welcome the launch last year of Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI), which has been set up by industry to lead on the development and promotion of initiatives to tackle such diseases.

In support of this industry-led initiative I am pleased to announce that my Department will provide start-up funding to help Animal Health and Welfare NI deliver its BVD eradication programme and to develop a Johne's Disease control programme.

I have no plans to incentivise farmers who participate in the AHWNI BVD eradication programme to dispose of 'persistently infected' calves. This issue did not form part of AHWNI's Strategic Plan on which the economic appraisal was based. However, as an additional incentive, the proposed start-up funding to AHWNI includes support to subsidise the cost of confirmatory testing of positive animals and their dams. The aim of this testing is to confirm that such animals are PI animals, and not transiently infected, before they are sent to slaughter.

The success of AHWNI's BVD initiative will depend on farmers' buy-in, not just in terms of their participation in the voluntary testing, but also in terms of their willingness to take the necessary actions to deal with infected animals.

In addition to the financial support for the BVD initiative, my Department is also delivering BVD awareness training through the Rural Development Plan in conjunction with AHWNI. The purpose of this training is to help make farmers and PVPs aware of the steps they can take to tackle BVD and the clear economic advantages to the farmer of so doing.

Horse Meat

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether farmers have incurred any costs as a result of the horse meat crisis.
(AQW 19999/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There has been extensive testing of meat and meat products in the past few weeks to identify the presence of equine DNA in food. These have included tests carried out by the FSA, DARD and the industry itself.

Farmers have not incurred the cost of these tests.

I met with retailer representatives on 13 February and made it clear to them that the cost of sampling food should fall on those businesses importing or utilising product which doesn't have the authentication provided by our own local traceability systems and that such costs must not fall to our primary producers whose product is second to none.

Fishing Fleet

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is helping the fishing fleet.
(AQW 20000/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department, through the European Fisheries Fund, provides significant financial support to the local fishing fleet. As well as offering individual grants to vessel owners wishing to modernise their vessels, grant awards have also been made under the Collective Action measure to initiatives which seek to, among other things, improve safety on board, provide training opportunities and improve the sustainability of the marine stocks. To date over £1.75m of EFF and DARD funds have been committed to projects which directly benefit the catching sector. An additional £3.36m has been awarded for improvements to harbour facilities and £0.98m to science projects which both provide indirect benefits to the NI fishing fleet.

My Department also assists the fishing fleet by working to maintain and increase the fishing fleet's fishing opportunities. My Department funds the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) who carry out fish stock surveys and data collection, which contribute to scientific stock assessments. Where these assessments demonstrate that fishing is sustainable my Department will argue in Europe for fishing opportunities to be maintained or increased. For example at the December 2012 Fisheries Council we were able to secure a 6% increase in the Area VII prawn quota, which is our most important stock, as well as a freeze in annual cuts in fishing effort. In addition, during 2012, my Department worked with the industry and the Commission to obtain an increase in the Irish Sea herring quota over a two year period. This was made possible thanks to additional DARD funded AFBI stock surveys that provided evidence that the herring stock could sustain higher fishing levels.

Ballypatrick Forest

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) who has sporting rights in Ballypatrick Forest; (ii) what are their responsibilities; and (iii) does their public liability insurance cover car owners on the public road.
(AQW 20047/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) My Department does not own the sporting rights for Ballypatrick forest. I am not in a position to provide you with the name of the private individual owning the sporting rights. The name of the private individual is withheld in line with their expectations of confidentiality and that all processing will take place in accord with Data Protection Principles,

(ii) key responsibilities of those exercising sporting rights are given in the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011,

(iii) my Department does not hold information on the public liability insurance cover of this private individual.

Horse Meat in Food Products: DARD Meetings with Food Retailers and Trade Bodies

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many meetings she has had with food retailers and trade bodies since the news of the horse meat scandal became public knowledge.
(AQW 20056/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have had one joint meeting with representatives of the NI Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) whose members include Spar, Costcutter, Vivo, NISA and many local traders, the NI Retail Consortium (NIRC) whose

members include Tesco, Sainsburys, Marks & Spencer and Asda, and a Lidl representative, to discuss the horsemeat issue and promote the reputation of local produce.

I have also had further meetings with the Equine Council for NI(ECNI) and the Chief Executive of Safefood in Dublin since the news of the horsemeat scandal became public knowledge.

Horse Meat in Food Products

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) how she plans to mitigate the damage caused by the horse meat scandal to the business of exporting meat; and (ii) the discussions she has had with Invest NI on this matter.
(AQW 20058/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The ongoing horsemeat issue facing the meat processing industry is deeply concerning to consumers, and to the wider meat sector as it is an important part of the agrifood industry which sustains up to 92,000 jobs, and represents around 20 per cent of total private sector employment.

I will continue to work closely with the Food Standards Agency and other government Departments and agencies, including Invest NI, to ensure all efforts are made to protect the reputation of our home grown produce, the sector, and its contribution to our economy.

To date, and to the best of my knowledge, the horsemeat issue has had a limited impact on the industry here in the North as it does not reflect the high quality and traceability of our own locally produced beef and lamb. I will continue to do all that I can to ensure that consumers are made aware, our beef is second to none and that they should have every confidence in the supply chain.

The LMC Beef & Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme and extensive traceability controls throughout the supply chain assure our customers of the total integrity of our beef and lamb. I will encourage consumers to continue to include locally produced red meat as part of their balanced diet and support our local industry. I have already met with representatives of the multiple retailers and emphasised to them the benefits of sourcing quality assured beef and lamb products from the north and building dedicated, sustainable supply chains with our farmers.

My officials have been in regular contact with their counterparts from Invest NI and continue to monitor the situation and share information on a daily basis.

I believe our industry is well placed to grasp any export opportunities that may arise due to the inevitable change in circumstances within existing supply chain arrangements in national and international markets and my Department will work alongside Invest NI and others to explore and develop any such opportunities.

Countryside Management Scheme Inspectors

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, to outline (i) the guidelines used by Countryside Management Scheme inspectors to determine the correct planting of hedgerows (a) prior to; and (b) after November 2012; and (ii) the guidelines used during these inspections.
(AQW 20062/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) DARD staff who carry out inspections for the NI Countryside Management Scheme check against management requirements for hedgerow planting which can be found on pages 59 to 65 of the Countryside Management Scheme 2007 – 2013 Information booklet. This booklet is available on the DARD website at the following link:

http://www.dardni.gov.uk/ruralni/dard_cms_info_cmb.pdf

This information was used both (a) prior to and (b) after November 2012.

(ii) The guidelines used during these inspections are supplied in part (i) of this answer.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, with regards to the Countryside Management Scheme, to outline the rationale behind the updated guidelines issued in November 2012.
(AQW 20063/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In November 2012 an addendum was issued as part of the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) 2007 – 2013 Information Booklet. This addendum provided updated scheme information which reflected changes to guidance for new NICMS agreements with a start date of 1 January 2013. The main changes in the addendum related to eligibility of scrub and the impact of ash die-back disease on availability of ash plants for Field Boundary Restoration.

Changes to advice about scrub reflected an alignment of NICMS with the scrub eligibility requirements developed in response to EU audit criticism.

The ash die-back advice informed scheme participants that, following the introduction of emergency legislation, supplies of ash plants will not be available for the coming planting season for the Field Boundary Restoration option within the NICMS or other options which could involve the planting of ash (such as Ungrazed Grass Margins planted with Native Trees).

DARD: Central Investigation Service

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Fraud Investigation Service, to detail (i) the number of staff employed; (ii) the number of alleged fraud cases that is has investigated; (iii) the number of convictions secured; (iv) the amount of money it has recovered; and (v) the operating costs of the unit, over the last five years. **(AQW 20065/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: In can confirm the following in relation to the five elements to your question:

(i) There are currently 3.8 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff in post in DARD Central Investigation Service (CIS). This includes:

1.0 Deputy Principal (DP) Head of CIS

2.0 Staff Officer (SO) Investigators

0.8 Administrative Officer (AO)

At 1 April 2011 there were 4.8 FTE staff in post. During 2011/12 this reduced by 1 SO Investigator to the 3.8 FTEs currently in post.

At 1 April 2010 there were 6.8 FTE staff in post i.e. 1 DP, 5 SO Investigators and a 0.8 AO. During the 2010/11 year this reduced by 2 SO Investigators to 4.8 FTEs.

At 1 April 2009 there were also 6.8 FTE staff in post.

At 1 April 2008 there were 5 FTE staff in post i.e. 1 DP, 3 SO Investigators and 1 AO. During the 2008/09 year this increased by 2 SO Investigators to 6.8 FTEs (the AO moved to part time working).

(ii) In the current 2012/13 year to date, 51 DARD cases of suspected fraud have been investigated by CIS. During the previous 4 year period, the following number of DARD cases were investigated:

2011/12	29 cases
2010/11	20 cases
2009/10	30 cases
2008/09	31 cases

(iii) 3 fraud convictions have been secured in the past 5 years. In addition, in this period the CIS obtained 10 cases of successful regulatory/legislative convictions.

(iv) It is not the responsibility of CIS to recover monies. Recommendations are made to the responsible business area, including, potentially, the application of penalties.

(v) The running costs to DARD of the Central Investigation Service for each of the last 5 financial years were as follows:

2008/09	£172,000
2009/10	£148,000
2010/11	£122,000
2011/12	£154,000
2012/13	£137,000 (projected)

The figures provided are net of income generated from work undertaken for other Government Departments and Agencies.

Ballypatrick Forest

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the damage caused to trees in Ballypatrick Forest due to the numbers of Sika deer; and, to detail the acceptable number of deer for the forest. **(AQW 20066/11-15)**

Mrs O'Neill: The damage caused to trees in Ballypatrick forest is primarily limited to some areas of recently planted sites and does not cause a threat to the long term sustainability of the forest. Forest Service continues to keep this under review as part of their normal forest monitoring.

The capacity a forest has to hold deer at a given point in time is dependent on the available habitats and food, both inside and outside the forest. Ballypatrick Forest is a large upland forest containing 1,470 hectares where planting began in the early

1950's and the harvesting and replanting of this first crop of trees is ongoing. To protect newly planted trees, my Department would not wish to see deer numbers at Ballypatrick forest in excess of approximately 120 deer in total.

Illegally Disposed Animal Carcases

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cases of illegally disposed animal carcases have there been reported in the last three years.
(AQW 20079/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There have been 110 reports of burial of cattle by farmers during the period 01/01/2010 until 31/12/2012. This method of disposal is illegal and the farmers concerned have been advised of this. Enforcement action will be taken against any farmer who repeats this action. To date no farmers have been prosecuted for this.

DARD receives reports of illegal dumping from members of the public and enforcement agencies. These reports are received on sporadic but infrequent occasions. All reports are investigated and of these 21 were investigated by the Central Enforcement Team resulting in 10 convictions.

Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification Funds

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much is uncommitted in Measure 3.1 Farm Diversification funds, in each of the groups.
(AQW 20099/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The table below details the figures you have requested. There are also a number of applications going through the assessment process that are not counted at this stage as committed funds.

	Completed	Issued & Accepted	Commitment	Implementation Plan Target	Uncommitted
ARC	1,307,409	1,119,791	2,427,200	3,645,613	1,218,413
DRAP	303,009	966,885	1,269,894	1,541,564	271,670
GROW	568,150	231,587	799,737	1,364,475	564,738
LRP	648,605	611,162	1,259,766	1,855,290	595,524
NER	1,120,248	1,036,243	2,156,491	2,500,000	343,509
SOAR	740,207	1,064,350	1,804,557	3,549,709	1,745,152
SWARD	1,240,889	1,412,406	2,653,295	3,820,000	1,166,705
Total	**5,928,517**	**6,442,424**	**12,370,940**	**18,276,651**	**5,905,711**

DARD: Legal Advice

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on legal advice in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 20127/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Departments legal costs for the last three financial years, as reported in the Departments resource accounts are as follows:

Financial year	Amount
2009/2010	£182,200
2010/2011	£186,757
2011/2012	£205,079

However, please note that these costs are specific to legal fees only and do not incorporate expenditure relating to compensation, outlay and other costs. These costs do not include DSO notional charges.

DARD: Fraud Hotline

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 19384/11-15, for a breakdown of the costs incurred by her Department in relation to raising public awareness of the Fraud Hotline, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20136/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department has not publicised the Fraud Hotline over the last three years and has therefore not incurred any costs. However, the Department has developed a Counter Fraud Strategy target to raise the public's awareness of the Fraud Hotline through a new poster campaign. The publicity campaign will be launched later this year.

Shooting Rights: Forests Owned by the Forest Service

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the tenure of the shooting rights for each forest owned by Forest Service.
(AQW 20145/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently 70 Licence Agreements in place for shooting rights in forests owned by my Department. The tenure of these forests is as follows.

Co Antrim

Forest	Period of Licence	
Woodburn North Carn	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Clare Ballykenver And Mazes	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Clare Kilmoyle Wood	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Clare East Capecastle	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Craigs	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Glenariff Parkmore	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Portglenone Glenone	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Portglenone Moneystaghan	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Garry Heagles	01/04/2012	31/03/2017

Co Armagh

Forest	Period of Licence	
Fews Aughnagurgan	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Fews Armaghbrague	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Fews Bonds Mountain	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Cold Brae	01/04/2012	31/03/2017

Co Down

Forest	Period of Licence	
Tollymore Clonachullion	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Mourne Crocknafeola	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Fathom	01/04/2012	31/03/2017

Co Fermanagh

Forest	Period of Licence	
Castlearchdale	01/04/2011	31/03/2016

Forest	Period of Licence	
Big Dog	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Knocks 2 Broughderg, Grogey	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Ballintempo	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Carrigan	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Sillees Coolyermer	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Sillees Glencunney	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Sillees Tullycarby	01/04/2010	31/03/2015
Doon	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Knocks 1	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Jenkin	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Lough Navar	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Spring Grove	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Riversdale and Necarne	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Tully	01/04/2009	31/03/2014

Co Londonderry

Forest	Period of Licence	
Banagher Altbritain	01/04/2010	31/03/2015
Derrynoyd	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Glenshane	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Goles/Sawelbeg	01/04/2010	31/03/2015
Iniscarn	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Moydamlaght	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Binevenagh Ballybrissel	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Binevenagh 2 Ballyleighry	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Grange Park	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Cam	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Cam Drumrammer	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Cam Kiltest	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Loughermore Knockbrack	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Loughermore East	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Loughermore	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Loughermore Tamnahern, Highmoor	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Muff Glen	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Springwell	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Aghadowey	01/04/2008	31/03/2013

Forest	Period of Licence	
Gortnamoyagh	01/04/2008	31/03/2013

Co Tyrone

Forest	Period of Licence	
Dunmoyle	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Cookstown Drumcairn	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Caledon North & South Ballymagran	01/04/2010	31/03/2015
Bradkeel	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Favour Royal Carrickavoy	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Creggan	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Lough Bradan	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Knockmany Errigal	01/04/2010	31/03/2015
Knockmany Killyfaddy	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Fardross	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Ligfordrum	01/04/2008	31/03/2013
Trillick Lissaneden	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Pigeon Top	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Seskinore	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Cookstown Drumconvis	01/04/2011	31/03/2016
Parkanaur Dunamoney And Legilly	01/04/2009	31/03/2014
Davagh Broughderg	01/04/2012	31/03/2017
Davagh	01/04/2011	31/03/2016

Forest Service Land: Access

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she will ensure that the safety of members of the public accessing Forest Service land is balanced with the needs of people who use the land for recreational and sporting purposes.
(AQW 20146/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service facilitates a large and varied range of activities and events in our forests each year. The safety of forest users is primarily achieved through adherence to the Occupiers Liability Order (NI) 1987 and the implementation of the Forestry Act (NI) 2010 and the supporting Forestry Byelaws.

Permission arrangements whereby third parties use Department land for activities and events are kept under review to ensure landowner responsibilities are fulfilled and organisations carrying out activities do so safely.

It is also important that all forest users act in a manner that protects their own safety and the safety of others who may be affected by their actions and our new byelaws provide us with a means to regulate the responsible use of forestry land by visitors.

Dog Licences

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 18770/11-15, to detail the number of dog licences registered in each of the last three years, broken down by council area.
(AQW 20161/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The table below details the number of dog licences issued in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in each Council area.

	2010	2011	2012
Antrim	4333	4473	4759
Ards	5418	7717	6889
Armagh	4467	4156	2742
Ballymena	8609	9274	9074
Ballymoney	3081	3367	3090
Banbridge	3689	4238	3918
Belfast	11466	10936	9928
Carrickfergus	2277	2425	2523
Castlereagh	4500	5173	4885
Coleraine	7260	8014	7186
Cookstown	2333	2479	2409
Craigavon	5355	5386	6797
Derry	2646	2871	3004
Down	6704	7047	6556
Dungannon	2661	2650	2473
Fermanagh	5013	5091	3828
Larne	4019	4467	4274
Limavady	2346	2600	2005
Lisburn	9256	9997	10008
Magherafelt	2118	2714	2204
Moyle	1962	1972	2095
Newry	4997	4973	4893
Newtownabbey	5966	7194	6697
North Down	6632	6149	6180
Omagh	2210	2344	2125
Strabane	2302	2960	2492
Total	**121620**	**130667**	**123034**

Slaughterhouses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail any incidences and the location of illegal slaughterhouses or rendering plants, over the last three years; and what action was taken against the operators.
(AQW 20185/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All approved slaughter premises here are staffed by DARD veterinarians who are present at all times when slaughter is occurring, to ensure the Food Business Operators' compliance with legislation.

There has been an instance of a suspected illegal slaughterhouse found here during the last 3 years. This was brought to DARD's attention by other enforcement authorities during investigations into criminal activities.

There are 2 rendering plants approved here to process fallen animals and carcasses. These are inspected on a monthly basis by Department staff to ensure that they are complying with the regulations. There have been no instances of illegal rendering plants found here during the last 3 years.

Land Mapping

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether, prior to the discovery of the software error in the LPIS mapping system, any of the early batches of maps distributed were affected by the error.
(AQW 20189/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: None of the maps in the early batches were affected by this error.

It is possible, however, that some maps in all batches may have had fields missing for different and unrelated reasons, for example where they were not declared on the previous Single Application form or where a field had been modified during the data capture process.

Rural Development Programme: Solar Energy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 19543/11-15, to detail the value of the grant awarded to each successful application, broken down by Local Action Group.
(AQW 20200/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The grant awarded to each successful application to Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme for solar energy projects are as follows:

Cluster	Number of Successful Solar Applications	Grant Awarded £
ARC	0	0
DRAP	2	50,000 8,000
LRP	2	1,327 300
NER	1	30,000
SOAR	1	2,400
SWARD	5	10,500 11,000 11,000 26,000 19,000
GROW	0	0

BTEC Certificate in Advanced Professional Investigative Practice

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 19381/11-15, to detail the training requirements and cost of attaining the BTEC Certificate in Advanced Professional Investigative Practice.
(AQW 20230/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Central Investigation Service (CIS) does not currently have any staff undertaking the qualification. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) is the training provider. Further information on the current programme and related costs would be available on their website. WWW.cipfa.org/training.

On-farm Inspections

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many on-farm inspections her Department has carried out in the last five years.
(AQW 20336/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In accordance with the rules governing the administration of the Single Farm Payment Scheme, my Department must carry out on-the-spot checks on at least 5% of applicants each year. These checks verify eligibility of claims under scheme rules. Table 1 summarises the number of land eligibility inspections carried out on farms claiming Single Farm Payment in each of the last five years.

Table 1: Single Farm Payment (SFP) Land Eligibility inspections from 2008 to 2012

Year	SFP Land Eligibility Inspections
2008	1,935
2009	1,932

Year	SFP Land Eligibility Inspections
2010	1,921
2011	1,893
2012	1,871

Single Farm Payments: Revised Entitlements

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of cases of single farm payment entitlements that have been revised in the last five years; and (ii) how many of these were following an on-farm inspection.
(AQW 20356/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

i) The number of farm businesses that have had their Single Farm Payment (SFP) entitlements revised at least once in the last five SFP scheme years is 10,931.

ii) Our SFP Entitlement Register does not hold information that shows the specific reason(s) for SFP entitlement revisions. However, it is likely that the majority of these entitlement revisions will have taken place because of reduced eligible land identified during on-farm checks. Farmer notified changes of land eligibility can also prompt a revision of SFP entitlements.

Single Farm Payments: Review Applications

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of applications that have been submitted for review using Review of Decisions application form in the last five years; and (ii) how many reviews have been successful.
(AQW 20357/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: From 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2012, my Department received 1,574 Stage 1 review applications and 264 SFP Stage 2 review applications. Of these, 32 Stage 1 and 20 Stage 2 applications did not proceed because the application was lodged after the required deadline or was subsequently withdrawn by the applicant.

Of the remaining 1,542 Stage 1 applications, 1,403 reviews have been completed. Of these the Department changed 182 of its original decisions either in full or in part.

Of the remaining 244 Stage 2 applications, 162 reviews have been completed. Of these the Department changed 28 of its original decisions either in full or in part.

Neonicotinoid Pesticides

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to introduce a ban on the sale or use of neonicotinoid pesticides.
(AQW 20402/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is working with the three other devolved administrations on this issue, as the European Commission have requested views on the future of neonicotinoid pesticides on a member state basis. My officials are also liaising with their counterparts in the south.

Given the environmental and economic concerns relating to neonicotinoids, it is vital to take a proportionate and evidence-based approach to this issue, considering all of the many factors that affect bee populations. Therefore, DEFRA has commissioned field trials, to assess the impact on bees, which will produce final results and evidence within the next few months.

The vast majority of neonicotinoids are used for the treatment of seeds and their use here in the north is relatively limited. Pesticide usage statistics from 2010, provided by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, indicate that the neonicotinoids were used for seed treatment on 0.6% of the agricultural land area in the north of Ireland.

Ash Dieback Disease: Hurling Stick Manufacture

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with An Cumann LúthCleas Gael on the supply of ash for the manufacture of camáin (hurling sticks) and the difficulties caused by the outbreak of ash dieback disease.
(AQW 20494/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At present I have had no discussions with An Cumann LúthCleas Gael about the supply of ash for hurley making. However I met hurley stick makers and other forestry stakeholders at a meeting in October last year in Armagh. I explained

the options open to us to prevent Chalara ash dieback becoming established here and I learnt from the hurley makers that there were regular imports of ash logs mainly for hurley sticks and for fire wood.

As this is a potential pathway for the introduction of Chalara ash dieback disease I explained that I thought this was an unacceptable risk to Ireland and that I intended to work closely with the authorities in the south along the lines of a "fortress Ireland" approach. The legislation which I introduced on the 6 November meant that ash can only be imported under certain technical conditions as set out in the order. I believe this is a proportionate response to the risk of introducing disease in wood which will allow manufacturers to continue producing hurley sticks.

Similar legislation has been made in the Dáil.

Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme Payments

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what the steps are being taken by her Department to ensure there are no further delays to the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme payments.
(AQW 20511/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has taken a number of steps to ensure more timely payments are made under the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).

One of the main reasons for delayed payments for 2010 claims was that the number of inspections had to be increased in-line with EU legislation. This was because a high level of farmer non-compliance and over-declaration was detected at initial scheme inspections. In response to this my Department has assisted farmers to help them meet the management requirements of their scheme agreement.

Subsequently we have made good progress with NICMS payments for 2011 claims. At 28 February last year, 85% payments had been made for 2010 claims, whereas we had paid 99% of claims at the same date this year. This improvement is, in part, due to my decision last year to reduce the number of new applications which were progressed to agreement stage.

My Department has already started inspecting 2012 claims and payments will begin once inspections are complete. We plan to start making 2012 payments in May, which is four months earlier than the 2011 claims commenced last year.

Badger Sett Surveys

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the total number of farmers in the 100 square kilometre area between Banbridge and Rathfriland who received letters asking for their permission for the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to conduct badger sett surveys on their land; and (ii) the total number of (a) positive; and (b) negative responses received to date from those farmers.
(AQW 20512/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Letters issued to 619 farmers in the 100km² area between Banbridge and Rathfriland seeking their permission for AFBI to conduct a badger sett survey on their land.

To date, 295 (47.7%) 'Yes' responses and 49 (7.9%) 'No' responses have been received with a further 16 letters returned as undeliverable.

Permissions continue to be received daily and, in order to encourage timely responses and to maximise the number of permissions received, DARD Direct are phoning those landowners who have still to respond and a reminder letter also issued on 1 March 2013.

Farm Safety

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to introduce a funding programme aimed at farming families which would allow the implementation of Health and Safety measures on farms.
(AQO 3561/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In November 2012 the Farm Safety Partnership, which incorporates representatives from my Department, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI), Ulster Farmers Union (UFU), National Farmers Union Mutual (NFUM) and Young Farmers' Club of Ulster (YFCU) launched the Farm Safety Action Plan to look at ways to significantly reduce work related deaths, injuries and illnesses on farms and to drive up health and safety standards on farms.

One area where the Partnership has been exploring is the potential for financial assistance to farmers to promote improved health and safety on farms and I expect a report on its findings to come forward in the near future. I will give serious and immediate consideration to any recommendations from the Farm Safety Partnership in the short and medium term to fund or resource any proposals that will improve health and safety on our farms.

However it is my belief that providing funding for equipment is only part of the answer and that Health and Safety awareness must be incorporated into the day to day activities of the entire farm family. My Department has developed a new health and safety short course directed towards the farming family and this is currently being rolled out across the north and I would encourage as many farmers and family members to enrol on this course as soon as possible.

Farm Maps

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to rectify the inaccurate maps that have been sent out to farmers for the 2013 Single Farm Payments applications.
(AQO 3570/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As a result of a technical fault, 3560 farm business maps were created which had a significant number of fields missing when compared to the farmer's previous Single Application Form. The problem is confined to maps processed as part of the last batch of maps (but a minority of that batch) which issued on 6 February.

This technical problem has now been repaired. I have issued a Press Release advising affected farmers that amended maps are available on-line and via DARD Direct offices. Additionally, their Single Application Form will be printed and sent out 2 weeks later than originally planned to provide additional time to advise of any necessary map adjustments, which can be pre-printed with the updates farmers report. My Department has written to all affected farmers advising them of this.

Rural Development Programme: Grants

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Joint Committees and Local Action Groups in delivering Rural Development Programme grants.
(AQO 3566/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Undoubtedly the economic climate has greatly affected the implementation of Axis 3 however the Clusters have now spent almost £40m of the total £100m budget and most are now nearing 100% commitment of all project funds. Over 718 projects are complete with an overall investment to date of £29m and this has helped to create almost 300 much needed jobs in rural areas. More importantly many rural communities and businesses are being sustained by Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme through these difficult times and are being provided with the infrastructure and equipment to maximise recovery.

But I am not being complacent and I have introduced monthly monitoring with a quarterly review of expenditure targets to ensure that all Clusters are achieving their targeted spend and where underspend is identified that these funds are removed and utilised effectively across the programme to ensure that no funds are returned to Brussels.

Broadband: North-West

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her plans for improving rural broadband to assist rural dwellers in the North West.
(AQO 3568/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have agreed to commit £5m to the Broadband Delivery UK project to be used exclusively to target rural areas of high deprivation that currently have no fixed wire infrastructure to access broadband to try and target disadvantage in rural areas. These funds are in addition to the £2.5m my Department has already invested in the Next Generation Broadband project.

My priority is to target areas of deprivation using the multiple deprivation indicators to give rural dwellers the opportunity to be part of the digital revolution and hopefully benefit through better access to the internet and online services. This in turn will give rural businesses and dwellers the opportunity to benefit in real terms from the expansion of the digital world. It is fundamental that we put in place this important infrastructure so that rural areas are not disadvantaged. I know rural parts of the North West will be amongst those that will benefit from this investment.

Puppy Farms

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is tackling the issue of puppy farms.
(AQO 3569/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 was passed by the Assembly on Monday 18 February 2013 and will come into operation here on 1 April 2013.

The Regulations will provide commercial dog breeders with clear standards which they must meet and maintain to ensure the welfare of all breeding bitches, stud dogs and pups in the establishment. The Regulations provide powers for action to be taken where a breeder does not meet these standards. I have ensured that Council inspectors have powers to take action and to prosecute any commercial breeder who is operating in sub-standard conditions.

I am confident that the new enforcement powers and penalties will act as a deterrent to those taking part in illegal dog breeding activities.

I appreciate that regulation alone will not stop so called "puppy farming". This will take a concerted effort by members of the public, future dog owners, good breeders and enforcement agencies working together to identify breeders, licensed or unlicensed, who put financial gain before the welfare needs of their dogs and pups. However, I believe that the new enforcement powers and tough penalties introduced by the new Regulations send out a clear message that such activities will not be tolerated. As I said in the Chamber on Monday 18 February, working together we can and will stop puppy farming.

Agrifood: Meat Contamination

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Veterinary Inspection Service is collaborating with Food Standards Agency officials in relation to dealing with meat contamination concerns in the agrifood sector.
(AQO 3571/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland (FSA NI) is the competent authority in matters of food safety and authenticity, while DARD delivers meat hygiene official controls on FSA's behalf in approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments, and hygiene inspections on dairy and egg farms. These activities are governed by Service Level Agreements with the FSA.

The response between Northern Ireland Departments has been co-ordinated through the Food and Feed Incident Management Group, which is chaired by my Chief Veterinary Officer. The Group has met a number of times.

In operational matters, senior officials from DARD and FSA in NI have maintained regular formal and informal contact throughout the incident. The Food and Feed Incident Advisory Panel, chaired by the Food Standards Agency and on which Veterinary Service in represented, has met several times. There is ongoing and regular liaison between FSA and Veterinary Service officials at all levels of both organisations.

Officials from DARD Veterinary Service and Agri-food Inspection Branch also assist the FSA with additional specific inspections on request. In this respect, Veterinary Service staff have carried out a comprehensive round of inspections of all local red meat cutting plants, in the second half of February, and with AfIB, have assisted FSA with a number of investigations during this recent incident.

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what compensation arrangements are being put in place to deal with young calves classified as Persistently Infected from Bovine Viral Diarrhoea.
(AQO 3572/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At farm level, production diseases such as BVD can have a significant impact on productivity. Such diseases are not subject to national control programmes and because their impacts are mainly at farm level, it is the responsibility of industry to take the lead in tackling them.

I therefore welcome the launch last year of Animal Health and Welfare NI, which has been set up by industry to lead on the development and promotion of initiatives to tackle such diseases.

In support of this industry-led initiative I was pleased to announce that my Department will provide start-up funding to help Animal Health and Welfare NI deliver its BVD eradication programme and to develop a Johne's Disease control programme.

I have no plans to incentivise farmers who participate in the AHWNI BVD eradication programme to dispose of 'persistently infected' calves. This issue did not form part of AHWNI's Strategic Plan on which the economic appraisal was based. However, the proposed start-up funding to AHWNI includes support to subsidise the cost of confirmatory testing of positive animals and their dams. The aim of this testing is to confirm that such animals are PI animals, and not transiently infected, before they are sent to slaughter.

The success of AHWNI's BVD initiative will depend on farmers' buy-in, not just in terms of their participation in the voluntary testing, but also in terms of their willingness to take the necessary actions to deal with infected animals.

Food Exports

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the consequences for the agriculture industry from expanding its place in the global food marketplace.
(AQO 3573/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The agri-food industry here has shown steady growth over the last decade with the food and drink processing industry alone achieving sales of £4bn in 2011, mostly in external markets. We are all aware, and concerned, about the dramatic fall in farm incomes in 2012. This should be viewed as a setback, and should not deflect our desire to continue to sustainably expand the industry.

The world's population is continuing to grow, with increasing demands for the type of food that we produce – high quality meat and dairy products in particular, and I know that our food companies are well set to meet these opportunities. However, food companies will only be able to meet the rising demand in the market if they have a sustainable supply of raw materials. We know we have producers with the skills and passion to deliver, but above all they need to be profitable.

Growth in itself will not guarantee profitability. Further global expansion will bring challenges such as increased exposure to rising feed and fuel costs, tailoring product to the exacting demands of different markets, stiff competition from other growing economies, and the need to balance growth with environmental sustainability.

To reap the potential rewards of growth, the industry needs to become more efficient, productive and innovative; it needs to be able to stand over the quality, safety and traceability of its produce and also to work more closely with others in the supply chain.

I expect these and other issues to be covered by the Agri-Food Strategy Board when it releases its report in the coming weeks.

Food: Local Produce

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the recent horse meat scandal, what additional resources she will provide to encourage shoppers to buy local produce.
(AQO 3574/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This whole issue has been regrettable and my Department continues to work with the Food Standards Agency who lead on the investigation relating to the horse meat issue. To date, and to the best of my knowledge, the horsemeat issue has had a limited impact on the industry here in the North as it does not reflect on the high quality and traceability of our own locally produced beef and lamb. I will continue to do all that I can to ensure that consumers are aware that our beef and lamb are second to none and that they should have every confidence in the supply chain.

My Department will be reopening the NI Regional Food Programme in March which will allow eligible agri-food trade and representative bodies to apply for financial assistance relating to the delivery of agri-food initiatives. The predominant aim of the Regional Food Programme is to raise the awareness of quality, regional food both amongst domestic consumers and international markets, and to promote its consumption by providing financial support in the following four key areas – regional fairs/shows, information programmes, award ceremonies, seminars/workshops. Successful applications to the programme can obtain up to 50% financial contribution on eligible expenditure.

The objectives of the programme are to assist the local agri-food industry to develop and expand profitable and sustainable markets, to develop a thriving rural economy by raising the profile of local quality food and to increase co-operation and communication between all sectors of the local food industry, therefore providing a united front to buyers and consumers. By reopening the programme there will be a great opportunity for the industry to work together to highlight the benefits of purchasing local produce.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

DCAL: Projects Delivered

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the projects her Department and its arm's-lengths bodies have delivered since May 2007, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 18881/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which departmental functions will be transferred to local government under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 18947/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The functions which my Department plan to transfer are as follows:

Armagh County Museum

Armagh County Museum will transfer to the new Armagh/ Banbridge/ Craigavon Council.

Water Recreation Sites

Twenty water recreation sites will transfer to local councils. These are small sites which complement other leisure facilities owned by councils.

Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC)

The NIMC provides a support service to local government and independent museums. My department is currently completing a review of NIMC as part of its wider review of Arm's Length bodies, which includes consideration of whether any of its functions should transfer to local government.

Ice Hockey Teams

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding opportunities are available to ice hockey teams.
(AQW 19018/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, which is an arm's length body of my Department and distributes funding to sport in the north of Ireland, has advised that it currently has no funding opportunities available for ice hockey teams.

However, Ice hockey teams that are affiliated to Ice Hockey UK, the recognised governing body of the sport in the north of Ireland, may be eligible to apply for future Exchequer and Lottery funded programmes offered by Sport NI. Ice hockey clubs can register via the Sport NI website to receive updates on future funding opportunities as they arise.

Lough Erne: Pike

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the motion that was carried in the Assembly on 21 February 2012, for her assessment of how the inclusion of an indigenous fish section in the Department's Action Plan is relevant to current actions in Lough Erne in relation to pike.
(AQW 19177/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL is currently taking steps to develop a strategic plan for all fish stocks on Lough Erne. The Department will use scientific advice as the basis for the sustainable management of fish stocks on the Erne and consideration will be given to all factors that may impact on stocks, including commercial fishing.

Cycling Clubs: Funding

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding provided to cycling clubs in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19226/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the last five financial years, up to 31 March 2012, Sport NI has provided exchequer funding directly to three cycling clubs totalling £22,075. The details are provided in the table below: -

Date	Club Name	Programme	Amount
11/2/2010	Clann Eireann Cycling Club	Awards for Sport	£1,590
11/2/2010	Newry Wheelers Cycling Club	Awards for Sport	£3,161
16/12/2010	Ballymoney Cycling Club	Sport Matters: Capital and Equipment Programme	£17,324

Cycling

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department has done to develop the sport of cycling.
(AQW 19227/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Development of the sport of cycling in the north of Ireland is the responsibility of the governing body of the sport, Cycling Ulster. However, Sport NI, an arm's length body of my Department, has provided both exchequer and lottery funding of £1,119,797 to help Cycling Ulster develop the sport in the north over the last five financial years.

In addition, Sport NI provides on-going advice and guidance to Cycling Ulster on a range of development matters, including strategy development, governance, talented athlete support, club development and coaching standards.

Boxing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many registered boxing clubs there are in each constituency.
(AQW 19257/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are a total of one hundred and one boxing clubs across the north of Ireland which DCAL understands are currently affiliated to the governing body for the sport, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA). The numbers affiliated to the IABA within each constituency are detailed below: -

Constituency	Number of Clubs
Belfast East	2
Belfast North	10
Belfast South	3
Belfast West	14
East Antrim	4
East Londonderry	5
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	5
Foyle	6

Constituency	Number of Clubs
Lagan Valley	3
Mid Ulster	6
Newry & Armagh	7
North Antrim	3
North Down	3
South Antrim	5
South Down	9
Strangford	2
Upper Bann	6
West Tyrone	8
Total	**101**

Foyle Cup

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she would consider providing departmental funding for the Foyle Cup Annual Football Tournament.
(AQW 20010/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, through the NI Tourist Board (NITB), is responsible for events policy including provision of support and funding to events including sporting events such as the Foyle Cup. Consideration may be given to future potential funding in the context of my Department's priority of "Promoting Equality and Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Department of Education

Working Class Protestant Children

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education how the Education and Skills Authority will meet the needs of working class Protestant children.
(AQW 20082/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I welcome the fact that eventually I have been asked by a unionist representative, about the needs of protestant working class children in regards to the role of ESA.

When ESA is established it will be with a balanced and representative membership incorporating the representatives of Transferors of Controlled Schools. It will be equipped with statutory responsibilities for raising standards and school improvement. Therefore, the main way that ESA shall help Protestant working class children will be by working to improve their educational outcomes. Indeed, ESA will be a regional organisation with the capacity to address our uneven profile of educational achievement and performance – within which pockets of disadvantage and underachievement have prevailed. It will bring a common approach to support services focussing on equality and consistency.

In addition to this, ESA shall also be a delivery organisation that, for the first time, has a statutory responsibility for coherent and strategic area-planning of educational provision. It will also provide a regional School Development Service and Governor Support Service.

Finally, ESA shall be supported in its functions by the sectoral body for Controlled Schools. This body will act as advocate and representative for the interests of its sector to both DE and ESA.

Area Planning Process: Further and Higher Education Colleges

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he will include Further and Higher Education Colleges in the Area Planning Process; and why they have not been included to date.
(AQW 20092/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Further and Higher Education Colleges are not the responsibility of my Department. However, educational provision at these facilities may have an impact on Area Planning at post-primary level.

One of the objectives of the Terms of Reference for Area Planning is to take full account of appropriate and relevant FE sector provision for 14-19 year olds. As I stated in my statement to the Assembly on 26 February, the draft post-primary

plans provide the foundation on which to move forward and will be further developed to ensure they comply with the Terms of Reference.

Literacy and Numeracy

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, in light of the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report into literacy and numeracy levels and given that the 2011 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study results show that 76 percent of pupils learning maths were taught by teachers whose main area of study was primary education and did not include a maths specialisation, how his Department intends to raise standards.
(AQW 20116/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Our pupils performed exceptionally well in the recently published Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Our primary pupils were ranked the highest performing English speaking region in the world in both reading (ranked 5th out of 45 countries) and numeracy (ranked 6th out of 50 countries). Whilst the TIMSS study reported that 76 per cent of Year 6 pupils here were taught mathematics by teachers whose main area of study was primary education without specialisation in mathematics, it also reported that 91 per cent of pupils were taught by teachers who felt 'very well prepared' to teach mathematics.

The Department sets the minimum entry requirements for courses of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and has determined that all entrants to primary education courses must have achieved a standard equivalent to a GCSE Grade C or higher in English or English language, mathematics and in a science subject. While these are the minimum entry requirements, entry to ITE courses here is highly competitive and B Ed students generally have higher qualifications than the minimum entry requirement.

The ETI institutional inspection reports from 2009 (B Ed programmes) and 2010 (PGCE) which focused on the preparation of student teachers to develop literacy and numeracy skills amongst pupils through their teaching practice found explicit differentiation within the numeracy session between the learning intentions for the students and those for the children; the high importance given to the link between the students' own mathematical confidence and competence and their ability to teach numeracy effectively and the provision of remedial support for those students who have particular difficulties with aspects of mathematics.

I have in place a coherent set of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes when pupils are not achieving to their full potential. These policies are working but the challenge now is to ensure their effective implementation by all schools so that the improvement in educational outcomes continues, especially for pupils in socially deprived areas.

In addition, I launched an advertising campaign "Education Works" in September 2012. The campaign is of vital importance and aims to raise the value we, as a society, place on education. It aims to inform and engage all parents, in particular those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, to become more involved in their child's education. It is also intended to impact upon home/family and attitudinal factors by providing parents with consistent, authoritative information on the importance of education and the steps they can take to support their child in achieving good educational outcomes.

Specific Departmental interventions, such as the Delivering Social Change project which will recruit 230 additional teachers, are intended to have a positive impact on the raising-standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes for pupils who are most at risk of underachieving.

On the 1 March I announced an additional £3m to be targeted at raising educational standards in each of the next two years. £1m per year will be used in developing literacy and numeracy programmes in disadvantaged areas. A further £2m per year will be used to develop community initiatives to increase family and community involvement in education and will be awarded to projects that can identify schemes which meet the priorities of my Department and the Programme for Government targets set by the Executive for educational improvement.

Legal Advice Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on legal advice in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 20128/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below sets out how much my Department has spent on legal advice in each of the last three financial years. This includes notional costs in relation to the Departmental Solicitors Office (DSO), which are identified separately and the movement in legal provisions which is included in Other legal below. The credit figure in 2011-12 is due to the write back of a number of provisions relating to legal costs which were deemed no longer necessary.

	DSO Notional Fees £'000	Other legal £'000	Total legal £'000
2009-10	197	5	202
2010-11	108	110	218
2011-12	109	(68)	41

End Child Poverty Campaign

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the correlation between the findings of the recently published report by the End Child Poverty campaign and the level of educational underachievement.
(AQW 20156/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Social background is the strongest factor impacting on attainment here. I note the findings of the End Child Poverty campaign report, which again underlines the strong correlation between social background and attainment. I note particularly that the West Belfast parliamentary constituency has the highest level of child poverty in the north of Ireland and also had the lowest level of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs A*-C (or equivalent), including English and Maths in 2011.

I am determined to break the link between disadvantage and underachievement - through encouraging schools to set high expectations for their pupils and supporting and, where necessary, challenging schools to improve. I have a coherent suite of policies in place to raise standards and tackle educational underachievement in schools. These policies include the school improvement policy, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the revised curriculum, entitlement framework, the framework for early years education and learning and the SEN and inclusion review.

However, the continued use of academic selection by grammar schools is a barrier to addressing underachievement in disadvantaged communities. It disadvantages children from those communities even further as evidenced by the disproportionately low number of pupils entitled to free school meals who attend grammar schools. It damages children's confidence, their motivation to learn, and lowers their expectations of themselves contributing to the high levels of underachievement we are seeking to tackle. That is why academic selection needs to end now and my Department is working to bring that about.

In addition to my policies, my Department provides a range of assistance, programmes and services to ensure that disadvantaged children have access to and can fully participate in school life, obtain formal qualifications, enhance their employment opportunities and ultimately provide a route out of poverty. These include the provision of Free School Meals and clothing allowances and a range of programmes targeted at socially deprived areas, including Sure Start, extended schools, full service provision, Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry Bright Futures and nurture units.

School Mergers

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Education to set out the legal position in relation to schools from different sectors who wish to merge; and whether he has any plans to revisit this in light of Area Planning.
(AQW 20159/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under current legislation there is nothing to preclude schools of different management types merging. The legislative vehicle for such a merger would be a development proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986.

This would require the publication of a development proposal which should specify the size, location and management type of the proposed new school. The management type would have to draw from those covered by current legislation which are controlled (including controlled integrated), Catholic maintained, grant-maintained integrated or voluntary maintained. There is no provision for hybrid status.

I have no plans to change the legislative provision on this issue at this time. However, I will keep this under review in light of whatever recommendations emerge from the Shared Education Advisory Group.

Integrated Education

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how his Department has delivered on the Belfast Agreement commitment to facilitate the development of integrated education.
(AQW 20219/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As well as the commitment made in the Belfast Agreement, the Department of Education also has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education, which was introduced in 1989. I take that statutory duty, and the subsequent commitment made in the Belfast Agreement, very seriously.

The integrated education sector is one that has seen considerable growth. Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, the numbers of pupils availing of integrated education has increased from 11,382 to 21,031 according to the latest school census figures. The number of integrated schools has also increased from 40 in 1998 to 62 in 2013.

To help with the facilitation of integrated education, my Department provides funding to the Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) to assist the development of integrated schools for public benefit. Funding of £628k has been allocated for 2012/13.

In addition, DE also provides funding to help schools with the process of transformation to integrated status. This assists schools in the initial stages of the transformation process and with the employment of a teacher, from the minority community in the school, to assist with religious education. The budget available for 2012/13 is £261k.

I recognise the vital and valuable contribution that the integrated sector, together with all other sectors of education, makes to building a peaceful and stable future for our children.

However, as is the case for all of the other education sectors, my Department responds to parental demand for integrated education. It funds integrated schools that are robust, do not involve unreasonable public expenditure and meet the specified criteria. It does not favour one education sector over another.

Professional Qualification for Headship

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19187/11-15, whether he intends to make the Professional Qualification for Headship qualification mandatory; and when this will occur.
(AQW 20243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During school inspections the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) assesses the effectiveness of leadership and management but does not routinely investigate which qualifications the principal may or may not hold. The most recent summary of ETI evaluations of leadership and management can be found in the Chief Inspector's report for 2010-2012.

However, ETI has recently completed a three year review of school leadership development with a main focus on the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) programme. The report is being finalised and a publication date will be advised shortly.

In light of:-

- the development of a new professional support service in the Education and Skills Authority (ESA);
- The current review of teacher education encompassing leadership development; and
- The challenging financial climate

the Department plans to review leadership programmes to ensure that they continue to be responsive to the needs of schools and reflect the challenges of education in the 21st century.

These deliberations will inform any decisions on making leadership programmes mandatory.

Schools: Review of Computer Based Assessment System

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19583/11-15, what is the anticipated timescale for the completion of the review.
(AQW 20244/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked for all elements of the review to be completed before June 2013 to allow communication on the way forward in good time for the autumn term of 2013.

Professional Qualification for Headship

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effectiveness of the leadership across the 449 schools where the Principals hold a Professional Qualification for Headship qualification.
(AQW 20245/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: During school inspections the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) assesses the effectiveness of leadership and management but does not routinely investigate which qualifications the principal may or may not hold. The most recent summary of ETI evaluations of leadership and management can be found in the Chief Inspector's report for 2010-2012.

However, ETI has recently completed a three year review of school leadership development with a main focus on the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) programme. The report is being finalised and a publication date will be advised shortly.

In light of:-

- the development of a new professional support service in the Education and Skills Authority (ESA);
- The current review of teacher education encompassing leadership development; and
- The challenging financial climate

the Department plans to review leadership programmes to ensure that they continue to be responsive to the needs of schools and reflect the challenges of education in the 21st century.

These deliberations will inform any decisions on making leadership programmes mandatory.

Learning Support Units: South Eastern Area

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19963/11-15, for his assessment of the distribution of Learning Support Units within the controlled sector in the South Eastern area in relation to geographic convenience; and how he proposes to address any existing deficit.
(AQW 20259/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is the Education and Library Boards which are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making special educational provision for children with special educational needs in their areas. The distribution of Learning Support Units in the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) area is, therefore, the responsibility of that board.

The SEELB has advised that the location of Units in the controlled sector should be viewed in the context of other specialist provision namely;

i Special Schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties located at Beechlawn Special School, Hillsborough; Killard House Special School, Donaghadee and Longstone Special School, Dundonald;

ii. Specialist provision for pupils with social communication difficulties including Autistic Specrum Disorder located at The High School, Ballynahinch; Fort Hill Integrated College, Lisburn and Priory Integrated College, Holywood.

The Board reviews the number, type and location of all Learning Support Units and specialist provision on an annual basis.

School Mergers

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what priority he places on the identification of schools as suitable for merger or transformation to integrated status as a priority; and how his Department is supporting schools through this process.
(AQW 20264/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not identify schools as suitable for merger or transformation to integrated status. The impetus for transformation comes from a number of sources, for example, the school Board of Governors, Principal, staff or parents, or the wider community.

However the Department does provide funding to help schools with the process of transformation to integrated status. This assists schools in the initial stages of the transformation process, and with the employment of a teacher from the minority community in the school to assist with religious education. The budget available for 2012/13 was £261k.

The Department also funds the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

to promote, encourage and facilitate integrated education. This includes the provision of support for transformation as appropriate.

Area Planning Process

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on ensuring that the area planning process is rural proofed.
(AQW 20266/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's Sustainable Schools Policy is the framework used for assessing the viability and long term sustainability of schools and it is a key driver for the Area Planning process.

The policy was assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, Striking the Balance, before publication in 2009 and no adverse impact was identified. My Department also engaged with officials from the Rural Policy Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development when the policy was being developed to ensure that it adequately addressed rural needs.

The policy recognises the needs of rural communities and 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.

I fully appreciate the central place a school has for many communities, both urban and rural, and this is recognised explicitly in the Sustainable School Policy through the Strong Links with the Community criterion.

School Mergers

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what consideration will be given to the merger of schools across sectors as a way of ensuring access to education provision.
(AQW 20267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have said, and it is specified in the Terms of Reference for Area Planning, that I would welcome realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis which maximises the use and sharing of the existing schools estate.

It is a matter for school managing authorities in the first instance to identify where these opportunities exist. Any proposals brought forward to my Department will be given serious consideration, but will need to align with Area Planning, be sustainable, have the support of the school management, parents and the local community and conform to current legislation.

I await the report from the independent Ministerial Advisory Group on advancing Shared Education, which is due with me very shortly. Any recommendations arising from that report will be taken into consideration as area planning develops.

Education: Professional Support

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the £25m savings from the budget for professional support.
(AQW 20278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The £25m of recurring savings from the budget for professional support are to be delivered from the following areas:

Spending Areas	£m
ELB School-related Centre Budgets	9.5
School Improvement Programme	6.9
Curriculum Development	6.0
CCEA	0.8
Regional Training Unit	1.6
Early Professional Development	0.2
Schools Transitional Costs	0.1
Total Savings	**25.0**

* Table may not add due to roundings

DE: Administration and Management Costs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the make up of the £15m savings being made per year from administration and management costs and the years in which the savings will be achieved.
(AQW 20279/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's published Savings Delivery Plan details the areas where savings are to be delivered across the 4 year Budget Period 2011-15. The table below details out the areas from where the administration and management costs savings are to be delivered:

£m

Spending Area	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
ELB School-related Centre Costs CCostsResource Budgets	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5
CCEA	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
CCMS	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5
Staff Commission	0.05	0.1	0.1	0.1
ELBs Youth	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Youth Council	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
Total Savings*	**15.0**	**15.3**	**15.3**	**15.3**

* Table may not add due to roundings

Education and Library Boards: Practice and Costs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the variation in practice and costs across each of the Education and Library Boards.
(AQW 20280/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The reports prepared by the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit set out examples of variation in practice and costs across a range of services provided by the Education and Library Boards.

These reports have been published on the Department's website and placed in the Assembly Library.

Lisnaskea High School

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education whether a Community Impact Assessment will be carried out on the possible closure of Lisnaskea High School; and to outline the rational behind this decision.
(AQW 20313/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I advised the Member on 25 February, in my answer to his earlier question on this issue, I am aware that the Western Education and Library Board is currently processing a statutory Development Proposal (DP) to support the merger of Lisnaskea High School with Devenish College. However, until a Proposal is published, the issues involved are entirely a matter for the Western Board to consider.

Area Planning Process: Rural Proofing Training

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education how many staff from (i) the Education and Library Boards; (ii) the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; (iii) his Department have undergone rural proofing training; and how many of these staff are involved in Area Planning.
(AQW 20337/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the number of staff who have undergone Rural Proofing training and how many of these staff are involved in Area Planning:

	(i) ELBs	(ii) CCMS	(iii) DE
Attended Rural Proofing training	9	0	2
Involved in Area Planning	8	n/a	0

Horse Meat in Food Products: School Meals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that school meals do not contain products contaminated with horse meat.
(AQW 20343/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is important to note that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has advised that there is no reason or evidence to suspect that there is a food safety risk from products which contain horsemeat or horsemeat DNA. However, it is not acceptable that mislabelled frozen meat products have been found in the food supply chain.

In line with advice provided by the FSA, I have written to the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to emphasise that, whilst there is no evidence that products which contain horsemeat or horse DNA pose a food safety risk, in circumstances where a Board is made aware that mislabelled frozen meat products are being supplied to schools it is imperative that immediate action is taken by the ELB to ensure these products are withdrawn and removed from school menus.

The ELBs remain in close contact with their suppliers to ensure that they are updated as soon as a supplier is made aware that a product may be mislabelled and that the necessary action is taken. I am aware that the ELBs wrote to schools and school meals kitchens recently, following the decision by a supplier to withdraw certain burger items pending receipt of test results, to advise that these products must not be used and will be removed by the supplier.

The Department has also written to schools in the voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated sectors to advise that where a school is made aware that mislabelled frozen meat products are being supplied to schools immediate action should be taken by the school to ensure these products are withdrawn and removed from school menus.

I have agreed that the Food Standards Agency will circulate to the Department and the Boards any communications in relation to the horsemeat incident/investigation.

I consider that through this approach we can ensure collectively that early action is taken to seek to ensure that mislabelled products are not supplied to schools.

Area Planning Process: Shared Education

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what action he is taking to encourage shared education within the area planning process, particularly within the legislative process.
(AQW 20368/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Terms of Reference for Area Planning requires engagement across all sectors and explicitly encourages creative and innovative solutions, including opportunities for shared schooling across sectors. The degrees of sharing may, however, be different to reflect local circumstances.

Area Planning Guidance issued by my Department in February 2012 also emphasises the commitment to shared education, highlighting the need for a willingness to develop more opportunities for sharing of both curricular provision and infrastructure in line with Departmental commitments in the Programme for Government.

I am also awaiting the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education, which is due shortly and I will consider the need for any further guidance in relation to how schools can share education after I have had time to consider their advice.

Area Planning Process: School Mergers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when he will issue guidance on how schools from different sectors can merge or share education as part of the Area Planning process.
(AQW 20369/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Terms of Reference for Area Planning requires engagement across all sectors and explicitly encourages creative and innovative solutions, including opportunities for shared schooling across sectors. The degrees of sharing may, however, be different to reflect local circumstances.

Area Planning Guidance issued by my Department in February 2012 also emphasises the commitment to shared education, highlighting the need for a willingness to develop more opportunities for sharing of both curricular provision and infrastructure in line with Departmental commitments in the Programme for Government.

I am also awaiting the report of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education, which is due shortly and I will consider the need for any further guidance in relation to how schools can share education after I have had time to consider their advice.

Primary School Pupils: Millisle and Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many children attend primary school in (i) Millisle; and (ii) Donaghadee.
(AQW 20371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are two primary schools in Donaghadee in 2012/13. These are: Donaghadee Primary School, which has an enrolment of 431 pupils; and,

St Anne's Primary School, which has an enrolment of 46 pupils.

There is one primary school in Millisle, Millisle Primary School. This school recorded an enrolment of 190 pupils in the 2012/13 school census.

Area Based Plans: North Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education at what stage of development are the Area Based Plans for (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in North Down.
(AQW 20393/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) **Primary Area Plans**

The Primary Area Plans I commissioned were received in my Department at the end of January 2013. I have directed the Boards that these be released for consultation on the 19th March, with an extended consultation period open until the end of June. This will allow for wide ranging discussion and further development of the plans.

My intention is that dialogue at local level, taking onboard the lessons learned in the post-primary process will result in more practical and sustainable solutions, including the potential, where appropriate, of increased sharing of accommodation and resources.

(ii) **Post-primary Area Plans**

Following my statement to the Assembly on 26 February 2013, the revised area plans for post-primary provision were released by the Education and Library Boards. The revised plans for the North Down area are available on the South Eastern Education and Library Board website - http://www.seelb.org.uk/

I have written to each Board outlining my Department's views on their plan and setting out how I plan to move forward. In the coming weeks my officials will meet with the Boards and CCMS to discuss in detail the Department's assessment of the plans and to identify areas where further work is needed.

A Steering Group will be established to assist the Department to co-ordinate and oversee the continuing development of the area plans. My Department will chair this group and it will include representatives from the Controlled, Maintained, Integrated and Irish-medium sectors. The group's work programme will aim to fill the gaps in the current area plans, to embed a single approach to area planning and to identify priority areas for action in the short to medium term.

Area Based Planning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how an area is defined under Area Based Planning.
(AQW 20396/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards, working with CCMS and engaging with other school sectors, have been tasked with developing strategic plans based on each Board area. Board areas comprise varying numbers of complete District Council areas ranging from one for the Belfast Board area to nine for the North-Eastern Board area.

District Council area level is the lowest level for which official population projections are published. These data, together with schools' census data, provide basic information necessary for projecting the levels of provision required. However, planning authorities may develop local solutions for areas within District Council boundaries providing that these are, in aggregate, consistent with the overall need for places.

Entrepreneurship

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what actions he is taking to promote entrepreneurship as a viable career option to children in schools.
(AQW 20399/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Employability, including entrepreneurship, is a key theme underpinning the revised curriculum which aims to better prepare all our young people for all aspects of life and work and enable them to develop as confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in our society and economy.

At primary level through the area of Personal Development & Mutual Understanding, pupils are now given opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes and personal qualities related to enterprise and entrepreneurship.

At post-primary level, entrepreneurship is covered under the Employability strand of Learning for Life and Work with a focus on Work in the Local and Global Economy, Career Management and Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. Pupils are given opportunity to reflect on their own skills and areas for self-development; to explore the changing concept of 'career' and various types of jobs, including in the local area; to explore enterprise and entrepreneurship; and to develop and practise some of the skills and attributes associated with being enterprising.

In addition to schools delegated budgets, my Department also provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation events and programmes either in school or at larger regional events, for both primary and post-primary pupils. These organisations include Young Enterprise, Sentinus, School Employer Connections, Charter Work Experience and a number of Business Education Partnerships. My Department, in partnership with Invest NI, has also provided funding to a number of enterprise/innovation programmes, including the 'Make Your Mark Challenge', as part of Global Entrepreneurship Week, and 'The Stock Market Challenge' event. Such events help to promote an enterprise culture within the classroom and to develop in our young people more innovative and enterprising skills and attitudes that our economy needs.

Dundonald High School

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for the proposal to cease education at Dundonald High school from 2014.
(AQW 20403/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for planning the Controlled schools' estate is a matter for the Education & Library Boards in the first instance. In the case of Dundonald High School (HS) this is the South-Eastern Education & Library Board (SEELB).

Any proposal to close a school requires publication of a statutory Development Proposal (DP). I understand that at present the Board is conducting a pre-publication consultation on the possible closure of Dundonald HS. This would involve consultation with the school's Board of Governors, parents of pupils at the school and staff at the school, and with other schools which the Board considers might be affected by the proposal. Following this, the Board will decide whether or not to proceed with the DP.

Should the Board decide to proceed, a two month consultation period will follow publication of the DP. This provides the opportunity for all interested parties to comment. It is only after the consultation period, when I have all the pertinent information and the comments received in support of or objecting to the proposal, that I will consider the rationale underpinning it in deciding whether to approve the DP.

Dundonald High School

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how many pupils left Dundonald High School with five or more GCSEs at grades A*- C, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20405/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below.

The number of pupils leaving Dundonald High School who achieved at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) 2006/07 to 2010/11

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Number achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents)	*	11	11	11	*
Total Leavers	97	96	67	59	54

Source: School Leavers Survey

* denotes fewer than five pupils

Dundonald High School was subject to a follow-up inspection in October 2012 undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). The ETI reported that overall, the quality of education provided by the school was inadequate. The areas for improvement identified by the ETI in the report include the need to raise standards across the school, including performance in public examinations.

Based on the findings of this follow-up inspection, the school re-entered the Formal Intervention Process with effect from 17 December 2012. The school had previously been in the Formal Intervention Process from December 2009 to September 2010.

Dundonald High School

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what consultation has been undertaken on the proposal to cease education at Dundonald High School from 2014; and for his assessment of the community response to this proposal.
(AQW 20406/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for planning the Controlled schools' estate is a matter for the Education & Library Boards in the first instance. In the case of Dundonald High School (HS) this is the South-Eastern Education & Library Board (SEELB).

Any proposal to close a school requires publication of a statutory Development Proposal (DP). I understand that at present the Board is conducting a pre-publication consultation on the possible closure of Dundonald HS. This would involve consultation with the school's Board of Governors, parents of pupils at the school and staff at the school, and with other schools which the Board considers might be affected by the proposal. Following this, the Board will decide whether or not to proceed with the DP.

Should the Board decide to proceed, a two month consultation period will follow publication of the DP. This provides the opportunity for all interested parties to comment. It is only after the consultation period, when I have all the pertinent information and the comments received in support of or objecting to the proposal, that I will consider the rationale underpinning it in deciding whether to approve the DP.

Education and Skills Authority: Headquarters

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education what locations are under consideration for the headquarters of the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 20409/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education & Skills Authority will be a regional organisation with a very strong local presence to provide effective support to schools, children and young people. At present any work on future location is focussed on maintaining continuity of service through staff based in their current locations.

It is anticipated that when restructuring is complete, services will be organised to achieve maximum effectiveness. ESA headquarters will be established to support the ESA Chair, ESA Board members and the Chief Executive.

No specific locations for an ESA headquarters are currently under consideration.

Head Teachers

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19842/11-15, which discussions between departmental officials and unions and employers have been on the position of head teachers; and what the outcomes of these discussions were.
(AQW 20480/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been discussions about an Efficient Discharge Scheme which would enable Employing Authorities to terminate the employment of teachers of any grade, including principals and vice-principals. There have been no discussions specifically on the position of head teachers.

Pupils Studying Languages

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who studied (i) French; (ii) German; and (iii) Spanish to GCSE level in schools in the South Belfast constituency, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20490/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below:

Number of year 12 pupils with examination entries in GCSE French, German and Spanish in schools in the South Belfast constituency, 2008/09 -2010/11

Subject	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
GCSE French	643	558	595
GCSE German	146	150	116
GCSE Spanish	355	394	367

Source: RM data solutions

Pupils Studying Languages

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who studied (i) French; (ii) German; and (iii) Spanish to A level in schools in the South Belfast constituency, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20491/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is contained in the table below:

Pupils with examination entries in A Level French, German and Spanish in schools in the South Belfast constituency, 2008/09 -2010/11

Subject	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
A Level French	104	74	68
A Level German	23	27	19
A Level Spanish	57	71	44

Source: RM data solutions

Department for Employment and Learning

University of Ulster: Day Care Nursery, Jordanstown Campus

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) what assistance his Department is providing to staff and students who made use of the childcare facility at the University of Ulster to find alternative arrangements; (ii) what assurances he can give in the absence of a childcare strategy for NI that everyone will now be able to access suitable and affordable alternative arrangements; and (iii) whether he has any concerns that the University of Ulster has broken its contract with students who have paid to study at the University on the basis that it provided childcare facilities.
(AQW 19911/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The University of Ulster has advised that it is to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013. The University has reported that the provision was sustaining an ongoing annual deficit of approximately £114k and therefore the University no longer considers it to be economically viable. The University has pointed out that between the two campuses 23 students currently use the childcare facilities.

To assist students and staff in their search to find alternative arrangements the University has compiled a list of all nurseries in the relevant areas, their availability and average costs. My officials have also contacted both the Western and Northern Health and Social Care Trusts to determine the extent of alternative childcare provision within a 3 mile radius of the Magee and Jordanstown campuses. There are 12 day nurseries in the Magee campus area and 10 in the Jordanstown campus area. Both Trusts have advised that there are a considerable number of registered childminders within each area. Many of the childcare providers report falling levels of occupancy for full-time places.

The average cost of full-time childcare nursery placements is between £120 and £140 per week at Magee and between £140 and £152.50 per week at Jordanstown. Childminding costs are around £3 to £4 per hour. These costs are in line with that charged by the University.

The package of financial support available to students with childcare responsibilities will remain unchanged. My Department makes available a means tested Childcare Grant to full-time students who have dependent children in registered or approved childcare. Payment is based on actual childcare costs paid in respect of registered or approved childcare for children under 15 (or 17 if the child is registered as having special educational needs). In addition, full time students with dependent children may be entitled to a means tested parent's learning allowance.

The University has advised that it will maintain its current levels of financial support for childcare for those students who are in need. Student parents can apply to the Student Support Fund and are also eligible to apply to the Student Hardship Fund. The amounts awarded are discretionary and dependant on students' individual circumstances. This support is paid irrespective of where the care is provided.

In the case of university staff a Salary Sacrifice Childcare Voucher Scheme is available for staff who use external childcare facilities. Staff are given the option of exchanging part of their gross salary for Childcare Credit voucher credit in order to save on the cost of childcare fees. Because the deduction is from gross salary, staff are effectively using some of their tax and National Insurance contributions to meet childcare costs. .

I appreciate that the closures may well inconvenience a small number of staff and students. However, given that the financial support packages available for childcare will be unchanged and also because there is evidence of alternative provision being available locally at a cost similar to that charged by the University for its on-site provision, those affected by the closure

should be able to access suitable and affordable alternative arrangements. My officials will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that there are no adverse affects on my Department's objectives to widen participation in higher education.

The University has provided my Department with assurance that it remains committed to its Student Charter including the Charter for Student Support. The University maintains that it is providing financial support for childcare in the form that the vast majority of students prefer, namely direct financial support. Most of the University of Ulster students who are supported for childcare choose to use the direct financial support available in order to avail of childcare facilities at locations which suit their individual needs.

Local Employment Intermediary Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the reach of the Local Employment Intermediary Service is sufficiently cross-community and whether it has been audited in relation to this and its Section 75 obligations.
(AQW 19925/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) is a community employment initiative designed to help the "hardest to reach" in the targeted areas of Belfast, Londonderry, Strabane, Newry & Mourne, Moyle and Cookstown find employment. In addition to these areas, LEMIS is also available on an outreach basis throughout Northern Ireland to individuals with a common employability barrier to finding work i.e. the homeless, ex-offenders/ex-prisoners, people with a history of drug/alcohol misuse and care leavers.

Analysis of LEMIS data indicates that the religious background of participants is as expected in each area e.g. the majority of participants in the Greater Shankill are perceived as Protestant while the majority of participants on the City side in Londonderry are perceived as Catholic. In the other less defined areas the religious background of participants tends to be more mixed. All the community organisations who deliver the LEMIS service work together as a network. They meet on a regular basis, formally and informally, to share best practice, help each other and work collaboratively on joint projects. LEMIS data indicates that clients from all the priority groups originally agreed are accessing the service. Section 75 data in respect of religious background, ethnicity, age, marital status, gender, dependents and disability for all LEMIS clients is recorded and collated on a quarterly basis. This information is used to inform the Labour Market bulletins produced by the Department and is copied to the Equality Commission for information.

Higher Education: Student Mothers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact on student mothers and their continuing capacity to avail of higher education, following the decision by the University of Ulster to close the day care nursery at its Jordanstown campus.
(AQW 19940/11-15)

Dr Farry: On 8th February 2013 the University of Ulster confirmed its decision to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013. The University has advised that the decision has been taken because the childcare provision has continued to sustain a significant annual deficit of approximately £114k and is therefore no longer economically viable. Also, the University points out that only 14 students use the childcare facilities at the Jordanstown campus with the majority of students with childcare needs choosing to use all direct financial support available in order to avail of childcare facilities closer to their homes/places of residence.

The package of financial support available to students with childcare responsibilities will remain unchanged. My Department makes available a means tested Childcare Grant to full-time students who have dependent children in registered or approved childcare. Payment is based on actual childcare costs paid in respect of children under 15 (or 17 if the child is registered as having special educational needs). A student with one child can receive up to £148.75 a week (85% of actual costs of £175 a week). Full time students with dependent children may also be entitled to a means tested parent's learning allowance.

In addition, the University has advised that it will maintain its current levels of financial support for childcare for those students who are in need. Student parents can apply to the Student Support Fund and are also eligible to apply to the Student Hardship Fund. The amounts awarded are discretionary and dependant on the student's individual circumstances. This support and the services I have mentioned already are paid irrespective of where the care is provided.

To assist students in their search to find alternative arrangements the University has compiled a list of nurseries in the Jordanstown area, their availability and average costs. Also, my Officials have been advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that within 3 miles of the Jordanstown campus there are 10 nurseries registered for 397 places. On occasions these are only running at about 70% of capacity. The average cost ranges between £140 and £152.50 per week which is in line with the £150 charged by the University for a full-time childcare place. There are also 104 childminders registered within the comparable area for 570 places. Most childminders would charge parents £3 - £4 per hour and many are reporting that they do not have their full registered numbers.

I appreciate that the closure may well inconvenience a small number of students. However, given that the financial support package available for childcare is unchanged and also because there is evidence of alternative provision being available locally at a cost similar to that charged by the University for its on-site facility the closure of the childcare unit should not impact adversely on the ability of student mothers to continue their higher education studies.

Dyslexia

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the proportion of young people with a dyslexia related disability admitted to Health Profession courses at the University of Ulster compared to the other faculties of the University, in each of the last three academic years.
(AQW 19975/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details the proportion of first year enrolments admitted to courses within the "Subjects Allied to Medicine" subject area, aged 20 and under, at the University of Ulster who have self-declared that they have a dyslexia related difficulty compared to all other courses in each of the last three academic years, for which data are available.

Academic year	Subjects Allied to Medicine	All Other Courses
2009/10	2.4%	2.6%
2010/11	2.0%	2.4%
2011/12	1.5%	3.3%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

1 Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment.

2 HESA's disability coding frame changed in 2010/11 and therefore the figures for 2009/10 are not directly comparable with the 2010/11 and 2011/12 figures. In 2009/10, students with dyslexia related difficulties are those who assessed themselves as having a "specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia." Whilst in 2010/11 and 2011/12 students with dyslexia related difficulties are those who assessed themselves as having a "specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D".

3 Health Profession Courses at the University of Ulster have been classified as Subjects Allied to Medicine.

4 'Young people' have been defined as aged 20 and under.

Dyslexia

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of young people with dyslexia related difficulties who have been admitted to Health Profession courses at the University of Ulster, in each of the last three academic years.
(AQW 19976/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below details the number of first year enrolments admitted to courses within the "Subjects Allied to Medicine" subject area, aged 20 and under, at the University of Ulster and who have self-declared that they have a dyslexia related difficulty in each of the last three academic years, for which data are available.

Academic year	Enrolments
2009/10	15
2010/11	10
2011/12	10

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

5 Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment.

6 HESA's disability coding frame changed in 2010/11 and therefore the figures for 2009/10 are not directly comparable with the 2010/11 and 2011/12 figures. In 2009/10, students with dyslexia related difficulties are those who assessed themselves as having a "specific learning difficulty e.g. dyslexia." Whilst in 2010/11 and 2011/12 students with dyslexia related difficulties are those who assessed themselves as having a "specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D".

7 Health Profession Courses at the University of Ulster have been classified as Subjects Allied to Medicine.

8 'Young people' have been defined as aged 20 and under.

9 Figures in the table are rounded to the nearest 5.

Employers: Education and Training Requirements

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQO 3267/11-15, to outline what forums are available for employers and professional bodies to identify and articulate their education and training requirements, in order to inform colleges.
(AQW 20013/11-15)

Dr Farry: Skills for Care & Development is the sector skills council for social work, social care and children's services in Northern Ireland. Its Northern Ireland Board, "Workforce Development Partnership" meets every quarter.

The Workforce Development Partnership is made up of representatives from the NI Social Care Council, DHSSPS, DEL, Health Boards, public and private employers and trade unions in the Social Care Sector. It is a representative body which brings the needs of employers in the sector to the attention of the sector skills council.

While Further and Higher education colleges do not attend the Workforce Development Partnership, Gerry Cunningham, Head of Qualifications and Standards, NI Social Care Council meets the colleges on a quarterly basis as part of the post graduate course review.

My officials have also contacted the Department of Health, Social Services

and Public Safety who have confirmed the following.

> *"The Post Registration Nursing Education Commissioning Group (ECG) provides a forum where any specific training requirements can be raised for discussion and evaluation. Training courses may then be commissioned by the Department as part of the annual ECG Plan. The current ECG Plan does not include any training relating to counselling."*

University of Ulster: Childcare Provision

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) whether he submitted a bid for monies from the Executive Childcare Fund to sustain childcare provision at the University of Ulster in Jordanstown; (ii) the outcome; and (iii) if no bid was submitted, to outline the reasons for this.
(AQW 20021/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has taken a decision to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013. The University informs that the childcare provision has continued to sustain an annual deficit of approximately £114k and is therefore no longer economically viable. The University points out that 14 students use the childcare facilities at Jordanstown with the majority of students with childcare needs choosing to use the direct financial support available in order to avail of childcare facilities which suit their individual needs.

The University of Ulster is an autonomous body and as such is entirely responsible for its own policies around student services including childcare provision. It would therefore be inappropriate for my Department to bid for funding for such a service.

University of Ulster: Childcare Provision

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the decision by the University of Ulster to close the day care nursery at the Jordanstown campus.
(AQW 20023/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has decided to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013. The decision has been taken because the provision has continued to sustain an annual deficit of around £114k and as such the University believes it is no longer economically viable. Also, the University points out that 14 students use the facilities at Jordanstown.

The University has stated that it will maintain its current levels of financial support for childcare for those students who are in need. Student parents can apply to the Student Support Fund and also to the Student Hardship Fund. The amounts awarded are discretionary and dependant on the student's individual circumstances. This support and the sources I have mentioned already are paid irrespective of where the care is provided.

My Department makes available a Childcare Grant to full-time students who have dependent children in registered or approved childcare. The maximum grant differs depending on the circumstances of the student. In addition, full time students with dependent children may be entitled to a means-tested parent's learning allowance.

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have advised that within 3 miles of the Jordanstown campus there are 10 nurseries registered for 397 places. These are running at about 70% of capacity. The average cost ranges between £140 and £152.50 per week. This is in line with the £150 charged by the University for a full-time place. There are also 104 childminders registered within the comparable area for 570 places. Most childminders would charge parents £3 - £4 per hour, which is on a par with university crèche charges, and many are reporting that they do not have their full registered numbers.

I appreciate that the closure may well inconvenience a small number of students. However, the financial support package available for childcare is unchanged and also there is evidence of alternative provision being available locally at a cost similar to that charged by the University for its on-site facility. The closure of the childcare unit may not, therefore, impact adversely

on the ability of student parents to continue their higher education studies. My officials will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that there are no adverse affects on my Department's objectives to widen participation in higher education.

University of Ulster: Childcare Provision

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the decision by the University of Ulster to close the day care nursery at the Jordanstown campus correlates with his Department's target of widening participation in higher education.
(AQW 20025/11-15)

Dr Farry: Widening Participation in Higher Education by students from those groups which are currently under-represented, in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds continues to be a key priority for my Department. Last September, I was pleased to launch Access to Success the regional strategy for widening participation in higher education. The vision of this strategy is that any individual in Northern Ireland should be able to gain access to the higher education that is right for them, irrespective of their personal circumstances.

The University of Ulster argues that it took a decision to close its university managed childcare facilities in the Magee and Jordanstown campuses from 31 July 2013 because the provision sustains an annual deficit of approximately £114k and is therefore no longer considered economically viable. The University points out that 14 students use the childcare facilities at the Jordanstown campus.

I appreciate that the closure of the childcare facilities may inconvenience a small number of students. However, because of the financial support which is currently available to students, and also because alternative childcare provision is available locally at a cost similar to that currently charged by the University, the closure may not impact adversely on my Department's objective to widen participation in higher education. My officials will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that there are no adverse affects on my Department's objectives to widen participation in higher education.

The package of financial support available to students with childcare responsibilities will remain unchanged. My Department makes available a means tested Childcare Grant to full-time students who have dependent children in registered or approved childcare. Payment is based on actual childcare costs paid in respect of registered or approved childcare for children under 15 (or 17 if the child is registered as having special educational needs). In addition, full time students with dependent children may be entitled to a means tested parent's learning allowance.

The University has stated that it remains committed to providing direct financial support for childcare, which is the expressed preference of the majority of eligible students. Student parents can apply directly to the university's Student Support Fund and/or Student Hardship Fund. The amounts awarded are discretionary and dependant on students' individual circumstances. All of the available support is paid irrespective of where care is provided. This allows students more flexibility to choose the childcare provision which best meets their needs and to avail of childcare facilities closer to their homes.

My officials have been advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that there is a range of available nursery provision within 3 miles of the Jordanstown campus, some of which are operating at about 70% of capacity. The average nursery cost ranges between £140 and £152.50 per week which is in line with the £150 charged by the University for a full-time childcare place. There is also a range of childminding provision with most childminders charging parents £3 - £4 per hour and with many reporting that they do not have their full registered numbers.

The Access to Success strategy will require each higher education provider to produce a detailed annual Widening Access and Participation Plan, which will clearly set out its activities and expenditure to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The strategy seeks to put in place a student centred approach with tailored support mechanisms to ensure the successful progression and retention of students, including those with dependents.

Employment Schemes

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the employment schemes that are specifically aimed at getting people aged over 45 back to work.
(AQW 20135/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides a range of employment programmes that are available to adults of all ages.

Steps to Work (StW) is the Department's main adult return to work programme. The aim of the programme is to assist the unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment. StW is available to anyone aged 18 years old or over (16 in the case of lone parents) who is unemployed or economically inactive, irrespective of whether or not they are in receipt of benefit. The programme has no upper age limit.

Participation in StW provision is a mandatory requirement for all Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants aged 25 and over who have been claiming JSA for 18 months.

Between September 2008 and September 2012 (the latest date for which statistics are available) 17,430 participants (17% of all starts) aged over 45 started the StW programme. Between September 2008 and June 2012 (the latest date for which statistics are available) 13,030 participants aged over 45 left the StW programme. Of these leavers 3,080 (24%) moved into unsubsidised employment.

In direct response to the economic downturn my Department, as part of the Northern Ireland Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative, introduced an additional employment strand to the StW programme. This strand, called Step Ahead 50+, will provide

eligible participants aged 50 and over who have been out of work and in receipt of benefit for 12 months or more with the opportunity to avail of a fixed term job lasting up to 26 weeks in the Community and Voluntary Sector. Step Ahead 50+ will offer 300 job opportunities in 2012/13, 400 in 2013/14 and a further 400 in 2014/15. At 26 February 2013 a total of 75 clients have started this new strand of StW provision.

My Department is currently developing a new adult return to work programme which will replace StW in 2014. This new programme, called Steps 2 Success, will be available to unemployed people aged 18 and over. The mandatory point at which clients aged 25 and over will join Steps 2 Success will be 12 months in receipt of JSA. This is 6 months earlier than the current StW programme which has a mandatory entry point after 18 months in receipt of JSA for this age group. Clients who have been identified as having significant barriers to employment will be able to join Steps 2 Success early.

The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) is a community employment initiative designed to help the "hardest to reach" in the targeted areas of Belfast, Londonderry, Strabane, Newry & Mourne, Moyle and Cookstown, find employment. In addition to these areas, LEMIS is also available on an outreach basis throughout Northern Ireland to individuals with a common employability barrier to finding work i.e. the homeless, ex-offenders/ex-prisoners, people with a history of drug/alcohol misuse and care leavers.

There is no age restriction on people who want to use the LEMIS service. During the period April 2011 to March 2012, 352 LEMIS clients (16%) of those case loaded were in the 41 to 50 age group. A further 258 clients (12%) of those case loaded were in the 50 plus age group. Of these numbers 69 clients (15%) of LEMIS participants who moved into employment were in the 41 to 50 age group and a further 41 clients who moved into employment were in the 50 plus age group.

Finally, my Department's Disability Employment Service has a range of programmes and services, targeted at people of all ages, and specifically designed to support those who have health and disability related barriers to employment. These include, Work Connect, Condition Management Programme, Workable (NI) and Access to Work.

More detailed information on my Department's programmes can be found on the Department's website (www.delni.gov.uk) or by contacting a local Job Centre/Jobs and Benefits office.

DEL: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20168/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are 4 Information Officers employed in press functions and 4 Information Officers employed in marketing functions. There are 8 administrative staff employed in providing support in marketing, event management, internet, intranet and web administration functions.

The annual cost of this service at the end of the last full financial year (2011-2012) totalled £582,780.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the proposed budget for the Education Maintenance Allowance; and what proportion of this is funded by his Department.
(AQW 20242/11-15)

Dr Farry: Following the agreement by the Executive at its meeting on 7 February to introduce a number of changes to better target the means tested Education Maintenance Allowance scheme, its estimated budget requirement for the financial year 2013/14 is £25.8m, to which the Department of Education will contribute £1.85m and the balance of £23.95m will come from my Department.

Students Attending English Universities

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students from Northern Ireland have attended universities in England as first year undergraduates, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20249/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information on total Northern Ireland domiciled student enrolments at English Higher Education Institutions as first year undergraduates in each of the last five years is detailed below.

Year	Total
2007/08	3,635
2008/09	3,640
2009/10	3,520
2010/11	3,935
2011/12	4,420

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

1 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.

2 The above figures include enrolments for first year undergraduates only.

3 Figures for NI domiciled enrolments at the Open University have been excluded from the above table. Although The Open University is defined as an English Institution it is likely that any NI domiciled enrolments will not be based in England.

Higher Education: Distance Learning

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he has taken to develop distance learning higher education qualifications based in local universities.
(AQW 20251/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland, "Graduating to Success", published in April 2012, identifies the need for a more flexible learning environment which includes the expansion of distance and online learning. Distance learning is currently available through the Open University and other private providers. The strategy has set the objective that by 2018, modular and distance learning will be expanded to all students in higher education. A project team is currently being established to take forward this commitment

In December 2012, I met with the Director of the Open University in Ireland to discuss Northern Ireland's Higher Education Institutions' involvement with their Futurelearn initiative. Futurelearn will bring together a range of free, open, online courses from leading United Kingdom Universities, drawing upon the Open University's expertise in delivering distance learning and pioneering open education resources whilst increasing accessibility to higher education for students across the UK and in the rest of the world. Queen's University, Belfast is one of 17 UK Higher Education Institutions to become a supporting and working partner of Futurelearn Ltd.

Degree-level Qualifications: Further Education Colleges

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have been studying for higher and degree level qualifications in further education colleges, as opposed to universities, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20253/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of students studying for higher and degree level qualifications in further education colleges in each of the last five years for which data are available is detailed in the table overleaf.

Number of Students Enrolled in Higher Education Courses at NI Further Education Colleges (2007/08 - 2011/12)

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
9,250	9,510	10,545	10,480	10,745

Source: Further Education Statistical Record (FESR)

Notes:

(1) The figures presented above are a student headcount as opposed to enrolments (where the same student can be enrolled more than once).

(3) Data are rounded to the nearest 5 in line with data disclosure protocols.

Degree-level Qualifications: Further and Higher Education Colleges

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many degrees from universities in Northern Ireland and elsewhere have been studied under licence in local further and higher education colleges.
(AQW 20254/11-15)

Dr Farry: All of the 'Degree' level courses delivered by the six Further Education Regional Colleges or the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise are either validated by Northern Ireland Universities or franchised from UK Universities.

Validated courses, namely Foundation degrees, are courses that are developed and delivered by the partner institution (ie. the college) and where a student on the course is an associate student of the validating University. There are currently 32 full-time and 25 part-time Foundation degree courses available across the Further Education Regional Colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise. Many of these programmes are offered in more than one local college.

Franchised courses, namely Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees, are courses which are developed by a UK University and taught by a partner institution with the same content, structure, delivery and assessment as the home course at the University. Students are registered students of the awarding University. There are currently 12 such full-time degree

courses and 18 part-time degree courses delivered across the six Further Education Regional Colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise.

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he forsees any changes being made to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.
(AQW 20269/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department is in the process of conducting a public consultation on proposed changes to the TUPE Regulations, and this consultation will remain open until 11 April 2013. Any potential changes to the TUPE Regulations will only be decided upon after careful consideration of all responses to the consultation, and a full assessment of the impacts of any possible changes.

Industrial Tribunals: Audio Record of Proceedings

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether a litigant in person can arrange to make an audio record of the proceedings at an Industrial Tribunal hearing.
(AQW 20314/11-15)

Dr Farry: The default position, by virtue of the Contempt of Court Act 1981, is that tribunal proceedings may not be recorded without leave of the tribunal. However, the Rules of Procedure governing industrial tribunals grant broad discretion for a tribunal chair to manage proceedings on a hearing by hearing basis. Therefore, should any party apply to make an audio recording of the proceedings, it is a matter for the tribunal chair to consider and decide, in all the circumstances of the case, whether to grant leave.

In addition, the majority of industrial tribunal proceedings are now digitally recorded by the tribunal and a transcript can be made available to parties where a matter is before the Court of Appeal or the High Court, in the circumstances set out in the Tribunal President's Practice Direction which is available on the tribunals' website, www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk.

Careers Advice and Training Programmes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department ensures that careers advice and training programmes meet the needs of local industry and how often this is reviewed.
(AQW 20332/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's Employer Engagement Plan sets out how we will work with employers to help them up-skill and re-skill their workforce to meet the current and future needs of our businesses and the economy. A wide range of activities is taken forward in support of this objective.

Careers Advisers ensure that any advice they give is always tailored to the individual needs of the client but is informed by relevant and up to date Labour Market Information, which is developed and maintained by my Department, coupled with the regular briefing provided by the Sector Skills Councils. All Careers Advisers receive continuous professional development to ensure that their knowledge of industry and its requirements is fully up-to-date and embedded in their working practices.

The ultimate aim of my Department's Skills Solutions Service is to help companies become more productive and competitive within their sector. The Skills Solutions Service works proactively with local industry, helping companies to access all of the services available to recruit staff suited to their needs, and providing them with the opportunity to upskill and re-skill their current employees through the provision of bespoke training.

My Department's leadership and management development programmes were reviewed in 2011, leading to the introduction of a new, enhanced suite of programmes in January 2013.

The ApprenticeshipsNI programme offers high quality training to apprentices to equip them with the knowledge, understanding and competence to work at a high level in their chosen occupation. Each apprentice follows an industry recognised framework which is agreed with the relevant Sector Skills Council or Industry-Led Representative body who, on behalf of the sector's employers, determine the skills, knowledge and relevant standards required. You will already be aware that I recently announced plans to undertake a review of apprenticeships and youth training. My intention is to make the review process inclusive and to engage with all the relevant stakeholders. The review findings will be reported in the autumn of this year.

Tribunal User Group

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline (i) whether attendance at the Tribunals User Group, established by the Office of the Industrial Tribunals, is open to a litigant in person; and (ii) to detail any other similar user groups for such people.
(AQW 20354/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Tribunal User Group was established as a forum for employment law practitioners and representatives from interested bodies such as the Labour Relations Agency, the Equality Commission and my Department to engage with the industrial tribunal and Fair Employment Tribunal judiciary on the technical operation of tribunal rules and practices.

The objective of this engagement is to ensure that tribunals meet their overriding objective, namely to deal with cases justly; to ensure that parties are on an equal footing; to deal with cases in ways which are proportionate to the complexity or importance of the issues; to ensure that matters are dealt with expeditiously and fairly; and to save expense. This is not an appropriate forum for tribunal claimants or respondents.

I am, nonetheless, conscious of the need for the tribunal system to respond to the needs of all of its users. My Department has supported a number of tribunal research projects which have engaged existing and former tribunal claimants and respondents in informing the direction of tribunal reform. Furthermore, as part of the ongoing employment law review, my Department is engaging with organisations representing the interests of individual claimants as well as more frequent users of the system.

Finally, if any claimant or respondent is unhappy about either the tribunals' administrative service or judicial conduct, there are procedures in place to raise concerns and have them investigated. Where parties provide feedback on their tribunal experience with suggestions for improvement, all options are considered and, where appropriate, implemented.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

City of Culture 2013

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to specifically market the City of Culture 2013.
(AQW 19370/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW 19087/11-15 regarding NITB's activity to promote the UK City of Culture 2013 programme of events.

In addition, Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland in Great Britain and overseas markets and in 2013 will support the UK City of Culture by implementing a major programme of promotional activity focusing on Londonderry UK City of Culture and on other big events taking place in 2013 such as the World Police and Fire Games and the G8 summit. Activity includes an eight page supplement on Londonderry in the Sunday Telegraph, a series of advertorials placed in travel sections of national press and an e-marketing campaign targeting approximately 800,000 potential GB visitors.

Further activity from both agencies will take place as the year progresses.

Trade Contacts with China

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what business opportunities are available following the development of trade contacts with China.
(AQW 19923/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am delighted to report that a broad range of opportunities exist in China for Northern Ireland businesses. Announcements were made during the last trade mission in November by Wrightbus, Yelo, textHELP and Glenarm Salmon. I visited the Shenyang Aircraft Corporation and Shenyang Dimplex Electric companies both of which are important links in the supply chain of our companies here. I also promoted our universities and FE colleges in government meetings. Companies both on the multi-sector trade mission and exhibiting at the Food Hotel China Show have generated a significant number of leads which will require follow up. With commitment from our companies, there are clearly opportunities to grow our export sales to China.

Tourism: Multilingual Signage

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether legal advice has been sought and received on Northern Ireland Tourist Board funding for the erection of multi-lingual signage.
(AQW 19982/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board sought and received legal advice on this issue.

Tourism: Forecasting Accommodation Demand Research

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects the Northern Ireland Tourist Board commissioned Oxford Economics research into Forecasting Tourism Accommodation Demand to be released.
(AQW 19984/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This research, completed in 2011, relates to tourist accommodation supply and the potential shortfall against visitor projections to 2020. The research was commissioned for internal use only, with a view to contributing to the evidence base for future accommodation policy. A consultation exercise is planned for later this year which will also be used to inform the Department's policy position on this matter.

It was not planned to externally release the research.

Tourism: Forecasting Accommodation Demand Research

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the Oxford Economics research into Forecasting Tourism Accommodation Demand has not yet been released.
(AQW 19985/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 19984/11-15.

Tourism: Forecasting Accommodation Demand Research

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any engagement her Department has had with the Department of the Environment on the results of the Oxford Economics research into Forecasting Tourism Accommodation Demand.
(AQW 19986/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There has been no engagement with the Department of the Environment on the results of this research.

Tourism: Forecasting Accommodation Demand Research

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the Oxford Economics research into Forecasting Tourism Accommodation Demand; and whether he is proposing any action based on this research.
(AQW 19992/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the replies I gave to AQW 19984/11-15 and AQW 19986/11-15.

Equal Pay

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the measures in place to ensure that multi-site Foreign Direct Investors award equal pay.
(AQW 20006/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not have the authority to dictate the level of pay offered by international investors. Furthermore, it is essential that companies are allowed the scope to invest where they consider they will operate most profitably. This includes taking into consideration the market rate for salaries and other operating costs. Companies will pay the levels that they believe reflect the skills and experience needed to fill a range of roles and functions, which themselves may vary by location.

Prime Minister's Visit to India: Northern Ireland Businesses Represented

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many Northern Ireland businesses are represented on the Prime Minister's current visit to India.
(AQW 20131/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Randox Laboratories and Wrightbus were asked to participate in the Prime Minister's trade mission to India. Unfortunately, neither company were able to participate due to other business commitments.

Invest Northern Ireland's next organised trade mission to India is planned for 15th-19th April, it is anticipated that fifteen local companies will take part.

The mission will visit Mumbai and New Delhi and will be supported by Invest Northern Ireland's office in Mumbai.

Inward Investment: India

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the measures her Department is taking to encourage inward investment from the Indian sub-continent.
(AQW 20132/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland has permanent offices within the British High Commission network in India, located in Mumbai and Bangalore. The offices focus on inward investment, trade development and university linkages.

In December 2011, Invest NI appointed a new country manager in Mumbai and added a new Business Development Director in Bangalore to increase sales and promotional activities. Their primary focus is seeking Indian IT and Business Service companies to establish near shore operations in Northern Ireland to service UK and European clients. They are also establishing linkages with a fast emerging aerospace industry.

Regional Aid

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the discussions she has had with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills regarding the Regional Aid position post 2013.
(AQW 20139/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) leads on the UK's interaction with the European Commission on Regional Aid Guidelines (RAG). My officials, along with their counterparts in the other devolved administrations, are working closely with BIS officials to ensure that the interests of the devolved administrations are fully and appropriately reflected in the UK's interactions with the Commission. In particular, my Department has been keen to ensure that, post 2013, Northern Ireland's continuing unique circumstances are reflected in the revised RAG which are currently being developed.

Over the last eighteen months, I and my officials have been engaging extensively with BIS, at both a Ministerial and official level, regarding proposed revisions to the RAG and in particular on the UK Government's proposal to remove Northern Ireland's automatic assisted area status post 2013. This engagement has included several discussions and correspondence between myself and the Minister of State for Business and Enterprise, as well as ongoing correspondence with the Business Secretary of State Vince Cable on the issue.

I and my officials will be continuing to press BIS, at both a Ministerial and official level, over the coming months to highlight the Northern Ireland position in relation to Regional Aid in order to secure the best possible outcome in this regard.

Conference Facilities

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of local conferencing facilities; and the action she intends to take to improve the facilities.
(AQW 20140/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Business Tourism, which includes Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions, is worth £100 million to the visitor economy in Northern Ireland.

The Belfast Waterfront is awaiting funding decisions to enable a £20 million extension to be operational by the start of 2016. The venue will then have an additional 2,000sqm exhibition space, 5 breakout rooms each to accommodate 200 delegates and a banqueting facility for 750 people transforming it into a fully integrated convention centre.

This extension is being supported by my Department through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

G8 Summit: Visitors

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many visitors are expected to attend the G8 summit.
(AQW 20141/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The G8 Summit is recognised as an unprecedented opportunity to show the world what a great place Northern Ireland is to invest, work, study and visit. NITB, Tourism Ireland and Invest NI will be capitalising on the worldwide marketing opportunities it presents. It is not possible to estimate at this stage the future impact on visitor numbers arising from the Summit.

Flag Protests

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what additional actions have been undertaken by her Department in light of the impact of the flags protests on (i) tourism; and (ii) local business.
(AQW 20142/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department continues to work closely with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), Tourism Ireland and Invest NI to ensure that the benefits of Northern Ireland are promoted as a place to invest, work, visit and study.

My Department, through NITB and Tourism Ireland has agreed to provide a financial stimulus package to help promote Belfast. The elements of this package include a contribution to the Backin Belfast marketing campaign and broader tourism messaging in the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain markets, including a co-operative marketing campaign with carriers.

In addition NITB will continue to promote Northern Ireland as a visitor destination to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets through its Spring 2013 campaign which was launched on the 28 January 2013 featuring TV, Radio, Press, Outdoor, Digital and Social media coverage.

Tourism Ireland will implement a campaign of targeted marketing activities for Northern Ireland, targeting visitor growth from GB and from Europe through the targeting of the six top performing markets of Germany, France, Italy, Nordics, Spain and the Netherlands and from the US.

Invest NI has recently completed a series of inward investment company visits over a nine week period. In total nineteen company visits have taken place since 3 December, with no visits cancelled, including seven company visits with the Japanese Ambassador on 16 & 17 December.

On 16 January Oxford Consulting Group announced the creation of 33 new jobs in Northern Ireland.

Credit Unions

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 19822/11-15, to detail (i) the financial assistance that has been provided to the Irish League of Credit Unions and to the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions to help

credit unions that require guidance and assistance on the transitional arrangements; (ii) the remaining financial assistance available; and (iii) the date when the financial assistance will no longer be available.
(AQW 20206/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Detailed separate proposals put forward by each of the representative bodies have been considered and officials are finalising the terms of bespoke Letters of Offer with the intention that financial support of up £20,000 each will be available to the Ulster Federation of Credit Unions and the Irish League of Credit Unions to claim against expenditure incurred from the date of my statement to the Assembly on 22nd May 2012. It is anticipated that representative bodies will submit claims shortly after acceptance of the Letters of Offer.

Banks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to encourage banks not to reduce their presence in high streets of towns.
(AQW 20288/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While my Department has no statutory control of the banking sector, I fully recognise the challenges banks are facing as they seek to recapitalise and restructure and the implications this has on local operations and staff.

The DFP Minister and I have recently met with all the main banks in Northern Ireland and the various issues and impacts around bank restructuring were raised during these meetings. However, it should be recognised that bank locations are ultimately commercial decisions.

I have also previously met with representatives from the Irish Bank Officials' Association, the Finance Union, to discuss the issue of job losses in the banking sector and I am aware that the Finance Minister is due to meet with them again in the near future. We will continue to monitor this situation closely.

G8 Summit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there will be opportunities during the G8 summit to promote Northern Ireland internationally as a tourist and investment location.
(AQW 20307/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The G8 Summit at Lough Erne will provide unprecedented opportunities for both Tourism Ireland and Invest NI to promote Northern Ireland internationally. Both organisations are developing marketing plans to capitalise on the great opportunities the Summit presents.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the planned route of the Giro d'Italia 2014 will take include the Mourne area.
(AQW 20384/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Grande Partenza or Big Start of the Giro d'Italia is coming to Northern Ireland in May 2014. This is one of the three classic cycling races in the world, attracting huge media coverage across the globe.

The exact route has yet to be finalised. This is the remit of RCS Sport who will work with the teams to develop the route. RCS Sport has many years experience designing cycling routes that will be challenging for the cyclists and entertaining for the thousands of spectators and TV viewers to watch.

NITB would be keen that they include the Mournes in the route, as one of Northern Ireland's designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and will be working with them to encourage this where possible. However this will be dependent on the feasibility of this as judged by RCS Sport.

Tourism: Available Rooms in South Down Constituency

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of available rooms in (i) bed and breakfasts; (ii) hostels; and (iii) hotels, in the South Down constituency area.
(AQW 20385/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of available rooms in the Banbridge, Down and Newry & Mourne District Council areas is as follows:

(i)	Bed & Breakfasts (Includes Guest Houses, Bed & Breakfasts and Guest Accommodation)	406
(ii)	Hostels	115
(iii)	Hotels	575

The breakdown of rooms by category and council area is as follows:

Category	District Council Area	Rooms Units	Total Premises
Hotel	Banbridge District Council	35	3
	Down District Council	309	6
	Newry & Mourne District Council	231	6
	Total	**575**	**15**
Guest House	Banbridge District Council	4	1
	Down District Council	90	12
	Newry & Mourne District Council	41	5
	Total	**135**	**18**
Guest Accommodation	Banbridge District Council	-	-
	Down District Council	5	1
	Newry & Mourne District Council	17	2
	Total	**22**	**3**
Bed & Breakfast	Banbridge District Council	24	9
	Down District Council	138	40
	Newry & Mourne District Council	87	32
	Total	**249**	**81**
Hostel	Banbridge District Council	-	-
	Down District Council	77	4
	Newry & Mourne District Council	38	5
	Total	**115**	**9**
	Grand Total	**1096**	**126**

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board does not hold this information on a constituency basis.

Tourist Accommodation

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what venues in South Down are registered with her Department to provide tourist accommodation.
(AQW 20386/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are 283 premises certified by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to provide tourist accommodation in the Banbridge, Down and Newry & Mourne District Council Areas.

The information requested is only available in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format and a copy has been placed in the Assembly Library.

NITB has provided the list by categories of tourist accommodation. NITB does not hold this information on a constituency basis.

Department of the Environment

Gas Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether, in conformity with the approach of the Irish Secretary of State for Natural Resources, Fergus O'Dowd, he can assure the public that his Department will not make a decision on whether to permit unconventional gas extraction ahead of the publication of the Irish Environmental Protection Agency report into the safety of the process.
(AQW 18643/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I consider that it is best to assess unconventional gas extraction when more and fuller science is available. At that stage, a fuller evidence base will be available than currently. Consequently, I firmly

believe that only with a fuller range of science, including that from the FEPA which DOE is participating in and helping to fund, will there be a science basis to consider and conclude the proposal for fracking.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ireland, in conjunction with a Steering Committee, which includes officials from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, is taking forward a programme of research into the issue of Unconventional Gas Exploration and Extraction. I believe this is important work.

It is also important to note that this is a programme of research and the Steering Committee intends to publish a number of interim reports while the programme is underway, with a final report published at the end of the programme.

No planning applications or other environmental permissions have yet been received by my Department; however should such applications be received the nature of the proposal will be assessed against the existing scientific evidence base. As I have said, this will include the outputs from the EPA led programme of research as well as scientific evidence from a wider Britain, European and global context.

I have always said it is essential see the fullest range of science before any decisions are taken on permitting hydraulic fracturing. That is firmly what I believe. That is firmly how we should proceed.

Hare Coursing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what is being done to enforce the ban on hare coursing.
(AQW 18857/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The PSNI is responsible for enforcement of this legislation. However, while such authority is not within my control, given my responsibility for protecting our wildlife, I take a close interest in the work of the Partnership Against Wildlife Crime (PAWNI) which brings together all bodies involved in and with an interest in protecting our wildlife, including the PSNI. I will continue to support PAWNI in promoting effective enforcement of the law.

Taxis: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxis operate in North Down.
(AQW 18914/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are 519 taxis licensed in the North Down area broken down as follows:-

BT19	143
BT20	70
BT21	21
BT22	75
BT23	210

Taxis: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many prosecutions there have been for illegal taxis in North Down over the last three years.
(AQW 18915/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The numbers of inspections, prosecutions and fixed penalty tickets issued to taxis detected in the North Down area are tabulated below. The figures do not cover a full three-year period because the Driver & Vehicle Agency's enforcement database was not in operation until 1 April 2010.

Period	Number of Taxis Stopped	Number of Prosecutions	Number of Fixed Penalty Tickets Issued*
1 Apr 2010 – 31 Mar 2011	20	5	0
1 Apr 2011 – 31 Mar 2012	62	2	7
1 Apr 2012 – 30 Sep 2012	19	3	4

* DVA enforcement officers did not begin issuing fixed penalty tickets until April 2011.

The figures for prosecutions and fixed penalty tickets issued relate to a variety of public service vehicle offences, as there is no specific code for an illegal taxi.

Bangor Health Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) whether his Department has received a planning application to extend Bangor health centre; and (ii) at what stage of the planning process the application currently sits.
(AQW 19313/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department received a planning application on 31st March 2011 for the refurbishment and extension of the existing Bangor Health Centre. Full planning permission was granted for the development on 27th May 2011. To date, the Department has received no further applications to extend the building.

Pump Street, Derry: Excavations

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking in relation to excavations occurring in Pump Street, Derry.
(AQW 19317/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I recognise that a number of interested parties, including the Health and Safety Executive, PSNI, Roads Service, the Dean of the Cathedral and Derry City Council, have all expressed concern over reports of the clearing of this 'tunnel' in Pump Street, Derry. After this activity was first reported in 2009, NIEA Built Heritage staff officers contacted the person engaged in this tunnelling and sent him two letters expressing their serious concerns about the potential for collapse, explosion or damage to services, such as electricity supply. They requested him to stop, whilst also working to make all relevant agencies aware of the potential dangers. However, my staff in NIEA: Built Heritage inform me that because this is a late 18th or 19th century drain of little archaeological value, they do not believe that it falls within their remit to take matters further. I understand that no built heritage legislation has been broken, so consequently it is difficult for me to recommend any further action by NIEA: Built Heritage on this matter unless there is a significant change in circumstances. However, I can report that the Derry Area Planning Office, who closed an enforcement investigation into this case in March 2010, has recently received additional information and reports of work. My staff in the Derry Area Office has informed me that they will expedite a fresh investigation as a matter of urgency to determine if any unauthorised tunnelling has taken place. If a breach of planning control is indentified, I have instructed that appropriate enforcement should be taken to remedy the breach as a matter of urgency.

Renewable Energy Planning Applications: Lagan Valley

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will ensure that Roads Service does not cause unnecessary delays to renewable energy planning applications that can have significant economic benefit to the economy in the Lagan Valley area.
(AQO 3292/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Minister for Regional Development has advised that his Department's Roads Service has received consultation requests from DOE Planning, relating to three separate applications for proposed anaerobic digester plants within the Lagan Valley area. Roads Service has responded positively on two of the applications and is seeking further information on the third.

Roads Service has advised that it dealt with the applications (following receipt of the necessary information from the applicant) in accordance with the response times set out in its service level agreement with my Department.

On receipt of responses from DRD Roads Service my officials prioritised the further processing of the applications.

Drumclay Crannóg

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment where the artefacts that were excavated from Drumclay Crannóg in Co. Fermanagh will be displayed once the excavation process is complete.
(AQO 3297/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The excavations at Drumclay Crannóg have revealed a huge variety of artefacts and information, and the excavations are still ongoing. The ownership of the artefacts being found rests, at present, with the Department of Regional Development, as they have been recovered from their land. However, it would be appropriate for these artefacts to be put on permanent display in County Fermanagh, and the Fermanagh County Museum is a potential home. There have been other suggestions in relation to the display of artefacts, even the re-creation of the crannóg and more than one location in Co. Fermanagh has been suggested. Work is still going on at the crannog, and my officials will be in discussion with their counterparts in DRD Roads Service about post excavation requirements, including the long-term display of these artefacts. Officials in NIEA: Built Heritage already talked with the Manager of Fermanagh County Museum about creating an exhibition of the Drumclay finds.

The importance of and the character of the crannóg finds means a comprehensive approach is needed. In moving forward, I will meet with those who have expressed an interest in being involved in the future management of other artefacts.

Dereliction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQO 3284/11-15, which councils have put forward proposals to tackle dereliction.
(AQW 19369/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 22 councils put forward proposals to tackle dereliction and these are listed below. Additionally there was a proposal received from the Causeway Coast and Glen Cluster.

- Antrim Borough Council
- Ards Borough Council
- Armagh City and District Council
- Ballymena Borough Council
- Ballymoney Borough Council
- Banbridge District Council
- Belfast City Council
- Carrickfergus Borough Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council
- Coleraine Borough Council
- Cookstown District Council
- Down District Council
- Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
- Fermanagh District Council
- Larne Borough Council
- Limavady Borough Council
- Lisburn City Council
- Moyle District Council
- Newry & Mourne District Council
- Newtownabbey Borough Council
- Omagh District Council
- Strabane District Council

Incineration Contracts

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress being made with the award of 25-year incineration contracts by the three waste management authorities.
(AQW 19587/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Much of the detailed information pertaining to the waste infrastructure procurements is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements. However, I can provide the following summary of the current position of each project.

On 15 October 2012, SWaMP2008 announced the termination of its long-term waste infrastructure procurement following its decision on the basis of legal advice not to contest a challenge to the legality of its bidder consortium. The Department has requested a Post Project Evaluation from SWaMP2008.

The NWRWMG procurement is to provide Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) (140,000 tonnes capacity) and a Gasification plant (80,000 tonnes capacity), its Joint Committee having previously ruled out mass burn incineration as a potential solution.

At its meeting on 13 December 2012 the Executive agreed the provision of financial support to the NWRWMG to a maximum of £35 million over fourteen years. This commitment would materialise once the proposed waste infrastructure has been constructed and is operational, which NWRWMG has forecast will happen during 2015/16, subject to council ratification.

Following approval of the NWRWMG Appointment Business Case for its project by DOE and DFP, the members of its Joint Committee decided at their meeting on 19 December to recommend the appointment of a Preferred Bidder to deliver new waste infrastructure for the north-west region to their constituent councils for their consideration. That recommendation is currently progressing through the democratic cycle of council meetings.

The arc21 procurement involves a two stage process with up front Mechanical Biological Treatment (240,000 tonnes capacity) of Municipal Solid Waste to gain additional recyclate and biologically treat the remaining material to produce a fuel for combustion in a second stage conventional Energy from Waste facility (210,000 tonnes capacity).

arc21 is in the latter stages of dialogue with its remaining bidder and is working through a range of procurement issues, including affordability, land assembly and planning and permitting. It had previously forecast appointment of a Preferred Bidder in February 2013 but does not now expect that to happen until September 2013.

Council Invoices

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the delay in responding to AQW 18186/11-15; and to list by (i) name; and (ii) date the information received by his Department from each council.
(AQW 19677/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My department does not hold the information requested which had to be requested from each of the 26 councils. The response therefore took longer to collate than the standard response time for Assembly Questions. The details requested relating to responses are set out in the table below. The question has now been responded to and I attach a copy for your information.

Date Information Received	Council
09/01/2013	Ards
	Cookstown
	Craigavon
	Dungannon
	Larne
	North Down
10/01/2013	Ballymoney
	Derry
	Fermanagh
11/01/2013	Castlereagh
14/01/2013	Lisburn
	Strabane
15/01/2013	Armagh
	Coleraine
	Limavady
	Moyle
16/01/2013	Antrim
	Ballymena
	Banbridge
	Belfast
	Down
	Magherafelt
	Newtownabbey
	Omagh
17/01/2013	Carrickfergus
25/01/2013	Newry & Mourne

Local Government Staff: Compassionate Leave

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the procedures for compassionate leave for local government staff. **(AQW 19873/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The vast majority of employees in district councils are employed under the employment conditions set out in the National Joint Council for Local Government Services National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service. That agreement provides for Special Leave under Part 3, paragraph 7.9 in the following terms:

> *"Additional leave with or without pay may be granted in special circumstances at the discretion of the employing authority. Authorities shall give particular consideration to granting reasonable paid time off for dependants as defined under the Employment Relations Act 1999".*

The Labour Relations Agency advises that -

- a dependant is the husband, wife, child or parent of the employee. It also includes someone who lives in the same household as the employee. It does not include tenants or boarders living in the family home, or someone who lives in the household as an employee, such as a live-in housekeeper; and
- in cases of illness or injury, or where care arrangements break down, a dependant may also be someone who reasonably relies on the employee for assistance. The employee is entitled to take a reasonable amount of time off in the above circumstances. The legislation does not specify the amount of time off which is reasonable, since this will vary according to the circumstances of the emergency. The time off is not for caring but for making longer term care arrangements.

Planning Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment he has made of the assertion by the Confederation of British Industry, in its summary of the January Planning forum, that clause 2 in the Planning Bill would give more weight when making decisions to economic considerations; and whether he has received legal advice on this issue.
(AQW 19903/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Clause 2 of the Planning Bill does not give economic considerations more weight over other material considerations in the determination of applications for planning permission. I can confirm that the Department has received legal advice on this issue.

Flood Plains

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of (i) domestic; and (ii) non-domestic properties which have been built on flood plains, broken down either by council area or constituency.
(AQW 19912/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Historically many cities and towns in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in UK, have been built in valleys and along river corridors and thus have resulted in increased flood risk. The Department recognises that the effects of flooding on human activity are wide ranging, impacting on the economy, social well being and the environment.

In the last 5 years from April 2008 to September 2012 5,363 residential and 3,995 non-residential planning applications were approved within flood plains. This figure includes new and replacement developments as well as alterations and extensions to existing properties. This is categorised by Council District and year in the table attached. The Department does not hold records detailing how many of these approved applications were constructed.

The planning system cannot in itself prevent the flooding of properties but it does acknowledge the risks and uncertainties associated with climate change. The Department considers that actions to address these matters through the planning system should be based on a precautionary approach. This approach is embodied in the policies set out in Planning Policy Statement 15 'Planning and Flood Risk' to ensure that the development decisions we make today and in the future does not increase flood risk.

APPENDIX 1

The number of residential and non-residential1 applications2 that were approved on flood plains3, 2008/09 to 2012/13 Q24

Planning Area	LGD	2008/09			2009/10			2010/11			2011/12			2012/13 Q1 & Q2[4]		
		Residential	Non-Residential1	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total
Belfast	Ards	62	26	**88**	58	27	**85**	42	36	**78**	23	37	**60**	13	13	**26**
	Belfast	104	215	**319**	60	162	**222**	40	145	**185**	40	152	**192**	9	33	**42**
	Castlereagh	19	15	**34**	26	21	**47**	14	18	**32**	14	9	**23**	3	7	**10**
	Lisburn	71	33	**104**	76	27	**103**	42	17	**59**	50	16	**66**	14	9	**23**
	North Down	37	10	**47**	28	10	**38**	19	10	**29**	14	15	**29**	1	0	**1**
	Total	293	299	**592**	248	247	**495**	157	226	**383**	141	229	**370**	40	62	**102**
Northern	Ballymoney	40	7	**47**	19	22	**41**	24	12	**36**	19	10	**29**	1	2	**3**
	Coleraine	59	38	**97**	53	37	**90**	45	23	**68**	20	30	**50**	2	2	**4**
	Derry	36	68	**104**	25	72	**97**	30	50	**80**	21	70	**91**	5	11	**16**
	Limavady	47	12	**59**	24	22	**46**	34	16	**50**	18	25	**43**	5	8	**13**
	Moyle	31	23	**54**	38	35	**73**	28	28	**56**	13	20	**33**	3	6	**9**
	Strabane	70	45	**115**	36	34	**70**	27	39	**66**	26	28	**54**	5	5	**10**
	Total	283	193	**476**	195	222	**417**	188	168	**356**	117	183	**300**	21	34	**55**

Planning Area	LGD	2008/09			2009/10			2010/11			2011/12			2012/13 Q1 & Q2[4]		
		Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total	Residential	Non-Residential[1]	Total
South Antrim	Antrim	58	37	**95**	55	31	**86**	54	24	**78**	27	24	**51**	1	3	**4**
	Ballymena	94	38	**132**	73	36	**109**	55	45	**100**	38	33	**71**	9	4	**13**
	Carrickfergus	21	15	**36**	18	8	**26**	14	8	**22**	7	7	**14**	1	2	**3**
	Larne	16	12	**28**	30	11	**41**	12	4	**16**	9	8	**17**	2	3	**5**
	Newtownabbey	26	15	**41**	27	26	**53**	25	29	**54**	16	19	**35**	5	6	**11**
	Total	215	117	**332**	203	112	**315**	160	110	**270**	97	91	**188**	18	18	**36**
Southern	Armagh	79	24	**103**	67	23	**90**	47	23	**70**	65	23	**88**	9	4	**13**
	Banbridge	67	35	**102**	36	26	**62**	28	18	**46**	17	21	**38**	5	7	**12**
	Craigavon	71	52	**123**	64	47	**111**	48	23	**71**	34	30	**64**	8	6	**14**
	Down	80	24	**104**	80	39	**119**	48	29	**77**	40	47	**87**	12	9	**21**
	Newry and Mourne	93	80	**173**	89	80	**169**	63	88	**151**	72	80	**152**	21	23	**44**
	Total	390	215	**605**	336	215	**551**	234	181	**415**	228	201	**429**	55	49	**104**
Western	Cookstown	55	15	**70**	58	13	**71**	40	7	**47**	40	16	**56**	1	7	**8**
	Dungannon	149	56	**205**	92	34	**126**	74	31	**105**	48	25	**73**	5	6	**11**
	Fermanagh	191	67	**258**	227	90	**317**	128	54	**182**	89	59	**148**	6	9	**15**
	Magherafelt	70	27	**97**	67	21	**88**	57	27	**84**	33	17	**50**	5	5	**10**
	Omagh	117	73	**190**	79	58	**137**	53	48	**101**	49	51	**100**	11	7	**18**
	Total	582	238	**820**	523	216	**739**	352	167	**519**	259	168	**427**	28	34	**62**
Total		**1,763**	**2,825**	**1,062**	**1,505**	**1,012**	**2,517**	**1,091**	**852**	**1,943**	**842**	**872**	**1,714**	**162**	**197**	**359**

Notes:

1 Non-residential applications will include all applications, i.e. there will applications included in the table that are not properties.

2 The figures will include some applications that were for alterations/extensions.

3 The applications on flood plains have been sourced from the Q100 (2030) floodplain dataset.

4 Q2 of 2012/13 is our latest published information.

Road Accidents: Night-time Collisions

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration will be given to (i) non-regulatory approaches in reducing night time collisions involving young and other new drivers; and (ii) the feasibility of technological solutions, following the outcome of the Review of the Learner and Restricted Driver Schemes and Graduated Driver Licensing Consultation. **(AQW 19913/11-15)**

Mr Attwood:

(i) Following the consultation on the review of the Learner and Restricted Driver Schemes and Graduated Driver Licensing, I decided not to include night time restrictions in the package of measures I announced in May 2012, due to concerns about the enforceability of such restrictions and the extent to which they would impact on access to jobs, education and sporting and social activities especially in rural areas.

Instead I have decided on an alternative approach to reduce the number of night time collisions involving young and other new drivers, through the development of awareness campaigns which highlight the risks associated with new drivers driving at night, together with improved driver training.

One of the measures to be included in the forthcoming Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill will require the completion of a 'Learning to Drive' syllabus evidenced by a compulsory student logbook. Consideration is being given to requiring learner drivers to undertake and record that they have taken some driving lessons and/ or practice at night.

Regulating for night time restrictions is however an area which I may need to return to in future if the current proposals, including a passenger carrying restriction, do not prove sufficient in reducing night time collisions involving young and other inexperienced new drivers.

(ii)A further non regulatory measure my Department is taking forward at my behest is the impact and feasibility of technological solutions in improving the road safety of young drivers.

In particular my officials have been exploring with the local motor insurance industry the potential impact of young driver "Pay How You Drive" insurance products linked to in car technology capable of monitoring driving performance. In addition to monitoring and providing feedback on their driving performance and thereby helping to improve it, these products in effect also incentivise young drivers to adopt voluntary night time driving restrictions by offering cheaper insurance premiums for drivers who avoid driving at night.

A pilot study using information from local insurance companies' own pilot studies is to be undertaken to assess the impacts of telematics and its potential effectiveness in changing driver behaviour.

Planning: Vacancies for Professional Planners

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many vacancies for professional planners exist in each planning division.
(AQW 19918/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DOE currently does not have any vacancies for professional planners.

Question for Written Answer: AQW 18041/11-15

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 18041/11-15, when he intends to answer this question given that it is now significantly overdue.
(AQW 19978/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The response to AQW 18041/11-15 issued on 24 February 2013.

Beaches: Blue Flag Status

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment which beaches have Blue Flag status.
(AQW 19998/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In 2012 Northern Ireland had 11 Blue Flag Beaches: Magilligan (Benone), Magilligan (Downhill), Castlerock, Portstewart, Portrush Mill (West), Portrush Curran (East), Portrush (Whiterocks), Crawfordsburn, Tyrella, Murlough (Co Down) and Cranfield Bay.

The international Blue Flag scheme is administered in Northern Ireland by Tidy Northern Ireland. Blue Flag awards for 2013 have not been announced yet. The announcement is not expected before late May or early June.

Shale Oil Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department has been informed of any proposals to extract shale oil; (ii) to detail the method of shale oil extraction that is being considered; and (iii) what understanding his Department has of the environmental impact of shale oil extraction.
(AQW 20012/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has not been informed of any proposals to extract shale oil in Northern Ireland. My Department therefore has no information on extraction methods being considered, given DOE has received nothing on a proposal, if there is any.

Flooding: Drumnakilly Quarry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to bring a resolution to the flooding issue with the quarry in Drumnakilly that is affecting local residents; and whether his Department has made this issue a priority since it was raised on 16 January 2013.
(AQW 20014/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Flooding in itself does not fall within my Department's remit, Rivers Agency is the body with statutory responsibility for flooding issues. In an effort to expedite a resolution to this issue I have instructed my officials in NIEA to take

a multi-agency approach with Rivers Agency, DOE Planning and DRD Roads Service. As I have said, I am turning over every stone to have this matter resolved.

As part of this approach, at a recent meeting between NIEA and Rivers Agency, on 24 January 2013, it was identified that a number of investigatory actions were required to identify the specific cause or causes of the flooding and ultimately to determine how the issue can be resolved.

NIEA, Rivers Agency and Road Service have undertaken investigations on the site to determine the cause of the flooding. These investigations revealed two significant blockages. One blockage consisted of a plastic fertiliser bag in a gully on the McKiernan's property and the second blockage, in the storm line below the McKiernan's property, consisted of silt and other debris.

The plastic bag blockage was removed and the sand and gravel cleared by jetting the pipeline. Once the 2nd blockage was removed the floodwater began to dissipate immediately. A camera survey of the pipeline was also carried out which indicated that poor levels in the pipeline may be the most likely cause of the silt and other debris accumulation. Investigations are ongoing as to how the pipeline levels issue will be resolved. A follow up Rivers Agency inspection of the site, on 14 February 2013, confirmed that the flooding had ceased.

There continues to be an issue with discharge of water from the sand quarry upstream of the affected property. There is no record of the quarry owner having received consent from Rivers Agency, to discharge storm water from the quarry. In order to get retrospective consent the Quarry owner made application on 31 January 2013 in accordance with the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 to discharge storm water into the upstream end of the culvert that runs through the affected property. I am advised that Rivers Agency is currently withholding consent until a detailed drainage assessment has been carried out and submitted to the Agency for approval.

I can assure you that my Department has given this case a high priority and in addition to the proactive measures taken, as outlined above, both DOE Planning and NIEA have previously taken robust enforcement action in relation to this site and a number of further enforcement processes are currently ongoing.

My Department will keep all stakeholders updated on progress at this site, including the residents affected by this issue, and their representatives.

In addition, planning applications have been recommended for refusal and temporary stop notices have been served, with the opportunity to proceed to full enforcement. Moreover, a prosecution file has been submitted to the PPS.

In all the above ways, it is very clear the priority given by my Department.

Marine Bill

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment when the Marine Bill will proceed to Consideration Stage.
(AQW 20054/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is my intention that the Marine Bill proceed to Consideration Stage as soon as possible, subject to agreement of proposed amendments by my Executive colleagues and scheduling by the Business Office. I have asked my Marine Bill paper to be considered by the Executive, under the "three meetings" rule.

Planning Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning appeals have been lost by the Planning Service over the last three years.
(AQW 20078/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of appeals received by the PAC, decided and allowed in the last three business years is set out in the table below.

Business Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Appeals Received	515	435	451
Appeals Decided	1304	681	332
Appeals Allowed	516	226	91

Source: Planning and Water Appeals Commission Annual Report April 2011/March 2012

Councils: Chief Executives

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment which councils employ a Chief Executive on a (i) temporary; or (ii) part-time contract.
(AQW 20115/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) The following councils employ Chief Executives on a temporary basis:

- Cookstown District Council
- Down District Council
- Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council
- Strabane District Council.

(ii) The Chief Executive of Strabane District Council is employed on a part -time contract.

DOE: Staff Travel Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost to his Department of staff travel claims in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20194/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below provides the expenditure on staff travel claims in the Department for the last three years 2009/10 to 2011/12.

Business Area	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Department (excluding agencies)	389,958	298,636	287,656
Northern Ireland Environment Agency	260,282	289,446	292,362
Driver and Vehicle Agency	300,161	256,682	331,572
Total	**950,401**	**844,764**	**911,590**

The general increase in costs between 2010-11 and 2011-12 is in a small part, a consequence of the change in the NICS mileage rate from 40 to 45 pence. I have asked for a breakdown in the increase in NIEA travel, year on year, for the last three years, the increase in DVA costs by 18% 2010/11 – 2011/12 (partly due to training in relation to the migration from a previous financial system to Account NI) and how the costs generally can be controlled.

Beaches: Good Beach Summit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment when the next Beach Summit will take place.
(AQW 20198/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The next Good Beach Summit will take place in late May or Early June. A firm date has not been fixed yet because the Summit is to run in conjunction with the presentation of international Blue Flag Awards to our best beaches. Tidy Northern Ireland administers the Blue Flag Awards in Northern Ireland.

Beaches: Quality

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress that has been made on improving the quality of beaches.
(AQW 20199/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have now hosted five Good Beach Summits and meaningful progress has been made in a wide range of priority areas which collectively contribute to better beaches and a better beach experience.

The multi-strand action Plan groups work streams under four headings;

- Improve Water Quality;
- Improve Beach Cleanliness, Facilities, Management and Signage;
- Keep the Public and Media Batter Informed;
- Support the Coastal economy.

Notable areas where particularly good progress has been made include:

- Sewerage infrastructure improvements (eg Ballyholme and Newcastle);
- Catchment source apportionment studies (specifically including septic tanks) at Waterfoot, Ballygally, Browns Bay, Ballyholme and Ballywalter;
- Signage Project – in line with revised Bathing Waters Directive;
- Development of a Marine Litter Strategy.
- Protection of the public from polluted bathing water through a warning system.
- Development of a dedicated beaches web site – BeachNI.

All participants agree that the Good Beach Summits should continue although, there is an ongoing drive to include more coastal community and representative groups. The next Summit will be run in conjunction with the presentation of Blue Flags to our best beaches at the end of May or in early June. The Blue Flag Awards scheme is administered in Northern Ireland by Tidy Northern Ireland.

Wind Farm Applications

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment how many wind farm applications were (i) accepted on appeal; and (ii) withdrawn, in each year since 2008.
(AQW 20201/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2012 a total of 4 appeals were allowed and 14 withdrawn for wind farm applications as detailed in the table below.

Table 1

Financial Year	Allowed on Appeal	Application Withdrawn
2008/2009	0	3
2009/2010	0	2
2010/2011	3	7
2011/2012	1	1
Q1 & Q2 of 2012/2013	0	1
Total	**4**	**14**

Notes:

1 This is the number of wind farm applications that were appealed to PAC and subsequently allowed.

2 Q2 of 2012/13 is our latest published information.

Planning Applications: Rural Dwellings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for rural dwellings have been received since June 2011, broken down by district council area; and how many were (i) refused; and (ii) approved.
(AQW 20209/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2012, a total of 4,532 planning applications for rural dwellings have been received and 1,560 have been decided – 1390 (89%) approved and 170 refused. The table below shows these categorised by local government district.

Local Government District	Applications Received 01/04/11-30/09/12	Applications Approved	Applications Refused
Ards	196	159	10
Belfast	3	4	0
Castlereagh	42	35	1
Lisburn	251	239	7
North Down	37	28	0
Ballymoney	259	108	8
Coleraine	145	134	7
Derry	88	95	4
Limavady	123	121	12
Moyle	101	91	3
Strabane	118	114	6
Antrim	201	182	4
Ballymena	245	250	5
Carrickfergus	21	23	1
Larne	98	70	3

Local Government District	Applications Received 01/04/11-30/09/12	Applications Approved	Applications Refused
Newtownabbey	67	54	1
Armagh	279	447	10
Banbridge	189	209	3
Craigavon	176	183	6
Down	264	287	16
Newry &Mourne	467	558	36
Cookstown	183	214	3
Dungannon	264	254	5
Fermanagh	354	353	3
Magherafelt	272	216	5
Omagh	237	261	11
Total	**4532**	**4689**	**680**

Planning Applications: Farm Dwellings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for farm dwellings have been received since June 2011, broken down by district council area; and how many were (i) refused; and (ii) approved.
(AQW 20210/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period 1st June 2011 and 30 September 2012, 1358 planning applications have been received for a new dwelling on a farm. This figure is inclusive of applications for dwellings on a farm, replacement farm dwellings and dwellings for horse breeders.

The breakdown of this figure by District Council Area is set out in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: The number of planning applications received for farm dwellings, between June 2011 and September 2012

		Applications received 2011/12 (Jun11 to Mar12)	Applications received 2012/13 (Q1 & Q2)	Total Received
Belfast	Ards	44	23	67
	Castlereagh	7	6	13
	Lisburn	61	24	85
	North Down	6	2	8
	Total	118	55	173
Northern	Ballymoney	19	18	37
	Coleraine	24	13	37
	Derry	29	14	43
	Limavady	27	26	53
	Moyle	24	20	44
	Strabane	25	12	37
	Total	138	91	229

		Applications received 2011/12 (Jun11 to Mar12)	Applications received 2012/13 (Q1 & Q2)	Total Received
South Antrim	Antrim	55	20	75
	Ballymena	52	25	77
	Carrickfergus	6	1	7
	Larne	28	19	47
	Newtownabbey	14	10	24
	Total	155	75	230
Southern	Armagh	50	22	72
	Banbridge	32	21	53
	Craigavon	27	18	45
	Down	54	31	85
	Newry and Mourne	69	44	113
	Total	232	136	368
Western	Cookstown	43	10	53
	Dungannon	36	17	53
	Fermanagh	39	29	68
	Magherafelt	68	41	109
	Omagh	35	18	53
	Total	221	115	336
Total		**874**	**484**	**1358**

Table 2: The number of planning applications approved and refused for farm dwellings, between June 2011 and September 2012

		2011/12 (Jun11 to Mar12)			2012/13 (Q1 & Q2)			Total		
		Approvals	Refusals	Total	Approvals	Refusals	Total	Approvals	Refusals	Total
Belfast	Ards	4	0	4	25	3	28	29	3	32
	Castlereagh	0	1	1	5	0	5	5	1	6
	Lisburn	6	0	6	39	1	40	45	1	46
	North Down	3	1	4	2	0	2	5	1	6
	Total	13	2	15	71	4	75	84	6	90
Northern	Ballymoney	5	2	7	8	2	10	13	4	17
	Coleraine	9	1	10	11	3	14	20	4	24
	Derry	5	0	5	18	0	18	23	0	23
	Limavady	5	0	5	14	5	19	19	5	24
	Moyle	6	0	6	13	1	14	19	1	20
	Strabane	13	0	13	7	3	10	20	3	23
	Total	43	3	46	71	14	85	114	17	131

		2011/12 (Jun11 to Mar12)			2012/13 (Q1 & Q2)			Total		
		Approvals	Refusals	Total	Approvals	Refusals	Total	Approvals	Refusals	Total
South Antrim	Antrim	36	0	36	21	1	22	57	1	58
	Ballymena	28	0	28	24	0	24	52	0	52
	Carrickfergus	2	0	2	1	1	2	3	1	4
	Larne	11	0	11	12	1	13	23	1	24
	Newtownabbey	4	1	5	4	1	5	8	2	10
	Total	81	1	82	62	4	66	143	5	148
Southern	Armagh	13	0	13	35	0	35	48	0	48
	Banbridge	11	0	11	25	1	26	36	1	37
	Craigavon	12	0	12	18	1	19	30	1	31
	Down	6	0	6	41	6	47	47	6	53
	Newry and Mourne	14	4	18	37	3	40	51	7	58
	Total	56	4	60	156	11	167	212	15	227
Western	Cookstown	21	0	21	16	1	17	37	1	38
	Dungannon	18	0	18	17	1	18	35	1	36
	Fermanagh	29	3	32	22	0	22	51	3	54
	Magherafelt	28	3	31	26	2	28	54	5	59
	Omagh	13	1	14	17	3	20	30	4	34
	Total	109	7	116	98	7	105	207	14	221
Total		**302**	**17**	**319**	**458**	**40**	**498**	**760**	**57**	**817**

Planning Applications: Retirement Dwellings

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for retirement dwellings have been approved since June 2011, broken down by district council area.
(AQW 20211/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2012, 4,532 planning applications were received for rural dwellings and 1,560 applications decided of which 89% (1,390) were approved.

The information provided in the description of a proposed development does not always detail whether the proposal is for a retirement dwelling. As a result the Department is unable to further categorise this information in the detail requested.

The Table below shows the number of applications received, approved and refused per district council area from 1 April 2011 to 30 September 2012.

District Council Area	Applications Received	Applications Approved	Applications Refused
Ards	196	159	10
Belfast	3	4	0
Castlereagh	42	35	1
Lisburn	251	239	7
North Down	37	28	0
Ballymoney	259	108	8
Coleraine	145	134	7

District Council Area	Applications Received	Applications Approved	Applications Refused
Derry	88	95	4
Limavady	123	121	12
Moyle	101	91	3
Strabane	118	114	6
Antrim	201	182	4
Ballymena	245	250	5
Carrickfergus	21	23	1
Larne	98	70	3
Newtownabbey	67	54	1
Armagh	279	447	10
Banbridge	189	209	3
Craigavon	176	183	6
Down	264	287	16
Newry &Mourne	467	558	36
Cookstown	183	214	3
Dungannon	264	254	5
Fermanagh	354	353	3
Magherafelt	272	216	5
Omagh	237	261	11
Total	**4532**	**4689**	**680**

Planning Applications: Business Premises

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for business premises have been (i) refused; and (ii) approved, since June 2011, broken down by district council area.
(AQW 20212/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period June 2011 to end of September 2012, 801 applications identified as proposals for business premises have been decided, 753(94%) of which have been approved and 48 (6%) have been refused. This is broken down by local government district in the table below.

Table 1 Planning applications for Business Premises decided by Local government District between 1 June 2011 and 30 September 2012

		Approved		Refused
	Total Decided	Total Approved	Approval Rate (%)	Total Refused
Antrim	23	22	96	1
Ards	33	32	97	1
Armagh	25	23	92	2
Ballymena	34	33	97	1
Ballymoney	12	12	100	0
Banbridge	18	17	94	1
Belfast	130	119	92	11
Carrickfergus	17	15	88	2
Castlereagh	12	11	92	1
Coleraine	40	38	95	2

		Approved		Refused
	Total Decided	Total Approved	Approval Rate (%)	Total Refused
Cookstown	33	32	97	1
Craigavon	46	43	93	3
Derry	53	51	96	2
Down	34	31	91	3
Dungannon	27	26	96	1
Fermanagh	40	39	98	1
Larne	3	3	100	0
Limavady	10	8	80	2
Lisburn	32	31	97	1
Magherafelt	15	14	93	1
Moyle	10	9	90	1
Newry and Mourne	62	56	90	6
Newtownabbey	23	23	100	0
North Down	33	32	97	1
Omagh	22	21	95	1
Strabane	14	12	86	2
Total	**801**	**753**	**94**	**48**

Notes:

1 September 2012 Is Our Latest Published Information.

Planning Application Q/2011/0220/O

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 18988/11-15, why he has yet to reply to correspondence from my office on planning application Q/2011/0220/O.
(AQW 20229/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The response to AQW 18988/11-15 issued on 21 February 2013.

Wind Turbines

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning applications for multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in North Down.
(AQW 20247/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are no current planning applications for multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in North Down however, the Department is currently processing two planning applications for single wind turbines on agricultural land within the same jurisdiction.

Planning application W/2011/0268/F was received on 24 May 2011. It seeks permission for a single 225kw wind turbine with a blade diameter of 27m and hub height of 30m at a site 210m North East of 78 Ballymiscaw Road, Holywood.

Planning application W/2011/0549/F was received on 08 December 2011. It seeks permission for a single wind turbine with a 30m hub height and 30m blade diameter with maximum output not exceeding 250kw at a site 457m South East of 69 Green Road, Bangor.

Wind Turbines

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current planning applications for single wind turbines on agricultural land in North Down.
(AQW 20248/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are no current planning applications for multiple wind turbines on agricultural land in North Down however, the Department is currently processing two planning applications for single wind turbines on agricultural land within the same jurisdiction.

Planning application W/2011/0268/F was received on 24 May 2011. It seeks permission for a single 225kw wind turbine with a blade diameter of 27m and hub height of 30m at a site 210m North East of 78 Ballymiscaw Road, Holywood.

Planning application W/2011/0549/F was received on 08 December 2011. It seeks permission for a single wind turbine with a 30m hub height and 30m blade diameter with maximum output not exceeding 250kw at a site 457m South East of 69 Green Road, Bangor.

Cars: High Intensity Discharge Headlights

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration is being given to altering MOT test regulation on cars with high intensity discharge headlamps.
(AQW 20300/11-15)

Mr Attwood: High Intensity Discharge (HID) headlights have been fitted in certain motor vehicles for a number of years. Compared with the more common Halogen headlights, HID headlights are more efficient, have a longer life and can be up to three times brighter. The benefit of this extra brightness is that it enables drivers using HID lights to see approximately 30% further than a Halogen System. The downside of this extra brightness is the potential to cause excessive dazzle to oncoming traffic. Dazzle can be caused if the lamps are dirty or aimed too high. Vehicles with HID headlights are therefore legally required to have a headlamp washer system and levelling system fitted before they are permitted to enter into service within Europe.

The assessment of the presence and operation of these headlamp cleaning and levelling devices was introduced into the annual vehicle test in compliance with European Roadworthiness Directive 2010/48/EU. This requirement was introduced into the annual vehicle (MOT) test in Northern Ireland on an advisory basis from 1 February 2012, and became a reason for failure from 1 May 2012. The use of vehicles on the road which do not have the washer or levelling system fitted to HID headlights is illegal and poses a potential road safety risk. A vehicle will fail the test in Northern Ireland where a mandatory headlight washer or levelling device is missing, inoperative or otherwise obviously defective.

The Department's operations, as detailed above, are fully in line with European Roadworthiness Directive 2010/48/EU and we therefore have no plans to alter the current MOT test regulation on cars with high intensity discharge headlights.

Minister of the Environment: Visits to Local Council Meetings

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment on how many occasions he has made official visits to local council meetings in the last 12 months.
(AQW 20306/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since January 2012, I have attended a meeting of each of the 11 Voluntary Transition Committees. I have also chaired four Regional Transition Committee meetings. I have attended a number of other meetings with Councils and their members. These were not in full Council formats. I have also met a range of local Council delegations on a number of matters.

Giro d'Italia 2014

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the announcement that a stage of the 2014 Giro d'Italia cycle race will be held in Armagh City, whether he will consider working with the local council to address issues of dereliction and gap sites with funding similar to that which was made available to Derry and Portrush for the City of Culture and the Irish Open respectively.
(AQW 20316/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As members know I believe the dereliction intervention should be "rolled out" across all NI Councils. To date, 8 Councils have benefitted from funding.

I am keen to assist any council where dereliction funding might be worthwhile and effective. I will be bidding to maintain into 2014. The Armagh bid, along with all other council bids, will be reconsidered as and when further funding becomes available and I hope it will become available quickly including through in-year monitoring rounds.

Any council can refresh its original bid if it wishes. Indeed I am writing to Councils to ask if they wish to adjust their bid. Armagh City Council may wish to reflect the importance of the 2014 Giro d'Italia cycle race in any revised bid.

Review of Public Administration: Transition Committees

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the timeframe for the statutory implementation of transition committees.
(AQO 3477/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I expect to lay the draft regulations for the operation of the Statutory Transition Committees in the Assembly in April. Subject to their passage through the Assembly process, this would enable Transition Committees to be placed on a statutory footing in May/June 2013.

To achieve this, I intend using the existing primary powers contained in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act 2010. However, as part of the process to constitute the Statutory Transition Committees, the

regulations must be considered firstly by the Environment Committee and then debated in a plenary session of the Assembly and later approved by resolution of the Assembly before they can be made.

Scrap Metal

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to introduce legislation to further regulate the scrap metal trade.
(AQO 3478/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Regulation of the scrap metal trade as an industry falls outwith the powers of the Department of the Environment. Therefore, I have no plans to introduce further legislation to regulate the industry as such.

However, what the DOE can and does do is regulate the waste/environmental activities carried out by scrap metal dealers and I am already taking steps to strengthen environmental legislation to help combat this problem.

While environmental measures will not address fully the problem of metal theft, it is considered that they will be useful to assist in dealing with the problem, since it has been identified that environmental legislation has a role to play in tackling the issue of metal theft, due to the fact that metal thieves often also commit environmental offences.

Therefore, with effect from 4th March 2013, the Department is commencing the powers contained in Articles 5, 9, 14, 15 and 16 of the Waste (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 and Sections 1 and 2 of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011. When commenced these provisions will:

- Allow the Department to issue fixed penalty notices for certain offences;
- Allow authorised officers (and in some cases constables) to stop, search and seize vehicles and to detain seized property; and
- Provide the Department with powers to make subordinate legislation in relation to waste carriers, including the power to impose certain conditions on waste carriers and to inspect vehicles to ensure compliance with such conditions.

A number of these primary legislative provisions, once commenced, will require further subordinate legislation. Therefore, commencement of the above powers will not, necessarily, provide a quick fix, as policy development and consultation will be required but work on this legislation is already started and officials are working to progress the necessary subordinate legislation as quickly as possible, taking account of other work priorities.

In addition, other proposals being looked at by the Department include amending the Duty of Care Regulations to remove the 7-days grace for waste carriers/holders to produce documentation to the Department upon request. The intention of this amendment is to make it a requirement to carry/hold the appropriate documentation with the waste to which it refers and make it an offence not to do so. This will allow authorised officers or the police to 'weed out' illegal transfer of wastes, including metal. Consultation on these proposals has already commenced and will close on 26 April 2013. Allowing for Assembly processes it is hoped that this legislation will be introduced by early Summer 2013.

Fly-tipping: Hazardous and Non-hazardous Waste

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the number of outstanding referrals or complaints of fly-tipping of hazardous and non-hazardous waste that were reported to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency within the past year.
(AQO 3479/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA have currently four referrals reported under the fly-tipping pilot arrangements which remain outstanding.

Planning Application: Sprucefield

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department had made an assessment of the impact of the former retail planning application at Sprucefield on other retail centres in Lurgan, Portadown and Craigavon.
(AQO 3481/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A major Article 31 planning application for a retail scheme including a Department Store, 19 Retail Units, restaurants and associated infrastructural development at Sprucefield, Lisburn for Sprucefield Centre Limited (S/2009/1045/F) was withdrawn by the applicant on the 31 January 2013.

This was on the eve of the date on which evidence was due to be submitted to the Planning Appeals Commission by the parties to the anticipated Public Inquiry on the 15 April 2013. The Department had in preparation for the inquiry considered the potential retail impact of the proposal on settlements within 60 minute drive time from the proposal. This assessment indicated that the proposal, when considered with other approved retail development of a similar nature, would significantly detract from the retail centres of Lurgan, Portadown and Craigavon with cumulative impacts respectively of 7.7%, 18.3% and 35.6 % respectively.

Vehicle Licensing Integration Project

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the Vehicle Licensing Integration Project.
(AQO 3483/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea are responsible for vehicle licensing throughout the United Kingdom but services are provided to customers in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport.

At present there are two separate IT systems involved, one for Northern Ireland and one for Britain, and DVLA are currently in the process of developing a fully integrated system for the whole of the UK.

An integrated system, which DVLA plan to have ready by November 2013, will enable customers here to get access to the enhanced services that have been available in Britain for many years, services denied to motorists in Northern Ireland by a lack of investment by DVLA in the IT system here. When this system is implemented, customers will be able to renew tax discs online or by telephone and carry out a wide range of transactions at Post Offices.

Although the introduction of online facilities and better services at Post Offices would be positive developments in themselves, DVLA are also proposing to use the integrated computer system to transfer all of the work not done online or in Post Offices to Swansea and to terminate the agreement with DVA, mirroring the planned closure of the regional and local motor tax offices in Britain and the centralisation of work in Swansea. That would take away the funding for 323 jobs in DVA, and reduce the quality of the services provided locally to those who rely currently on access to trained staff.

I am completely opposed to this proposal because of the impact on staff in DVA, who have consistently provided exceptionally high standards of service; because of the impact on the local economy, especially in Coleraine, where most of the jobs are based; and because of the impact on the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole. I have made it clear to Ministers in London that now is not the time to be cutting further public sector jobs when the Executive is working hard to stimulate and re-balance the economy, in difficult and challenging economic circumstances.

I am meeting the Transport Minister in London again on 5 March to discuss the current position and to press the case for the retention of vehicles licensing services, and the associated jobs, in Northern Ireland.

Car Insurance

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister of Justice and others to produce a package of measures that could lead to a lowering of the cost of car insurance, particularly for young drivers. **(AQO 3484/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: I am committed and taking any action. Separately, and working with the Minister of Justice, other Executive colleagues and relevant interests, the aim is to bear down on motor insurance costs.

To this end, I have been engaging extensively with insurance, legal and consumer organisations to identify and monitor concrete actions that can be taken to tackle the high cost of insurance premiums here. This work includes consideration of the issues of legal costs, referral fees and claims management companies, personal injury claims and telematics products. This work has included two recent meetings with the Association of British Insurers, Law Society (NI) and Consumer Council on 14/11/2012 and 08/02/2013. The agenda has been to decisively address insurance premiums, particularly for young drivers and rural dwellers. Motor insurance issues are also discussed at meetings of the Ministerial Group on Road Safety which I chair and which Minister Ford attends.

In addition, as part of my response to the problem, there are some practical and legal measures being taken forward in the Department. My officials are progressing a number of major road safety initiatives including graduated driver licensing, anti-drink and drug driving measures and mutual recognition of penalty points across the island of Ireland. The primary objective of these measures is to clearly reduce road deaths and serious injuries, but subsequent reductions in insurance costs would be an important secondary benefit. In my meeting with the ABI, I have been making the argument that if Northern Ireland has the most bold and radical driving regime in these islands and a consequence on road deaths/serious injuries, the insurance industry must reflect this in premiums, especially for young drivers.

MOT: Testing Guidelines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to align MOT testing guidelines with those in England and Wales, particularly in the case of pre 1960 classic or antique vehicles; and when this alignment will occur. **(AQW 20365/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The Department has consulted on possible exemption of certain categories of historic vehicles from MOT testing. The responses indicated that there is broad support for exemption of pre-1960 vehicles from periodic testing, in line with the British Government's exemption which has been in place since 18 November 2012.

The Environment Committee has indicated that it is content with the Department's proposed way forward following the consultation, which is to make use of the exemption in Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC concerning the periodic testing of pre-1960 vehicles.

However on 13 July 2012, the European Commission published a 'Roadworthiness Package' which, amongst other things, addresses periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles, therein making changes to the rules that apply to historic vehicles; the proposals are expected to be introduced no earlier than August 2014.

If implemented as then drafted, these proposals would narrow the parameters within which the Department can provide for exemptions to historic vehicles, as the definition of a historical vehicle was more prescriptively described. While the

Department's policy intentions remained the same; that is to make exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT regime, we had to be mindful of the changing legislative context, to ensure that any changes we make are not made redundant by incoming EC Regulations.

Following receipt of a further update on the EU negotiations regarding the roadworthiness package, one of the main amendments in which was a change to the definition of "historic vehicles" which allows vehicles that have not undergone "substantial" changes to be still classed as historic, I have instructed officials to proceed with legislative amendment to exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT test.

There are a number of issues that have needed to be resolved, including provision for a voluntary MOT test for such vehicles (for purposes including cherished plate transfer), where Northern Ireland law differs from British law and have needed careful attention. However, I believe that we are now close to resolving these issues with the Departmental Solicitors. Subject to receipt of final advice, the Department will now amend the relevant legislation to exempt pre-1960 vehicles from MOT testing and I will shortly confirm the timescale to bring about this legislative change.

Review of Public Administration: Shadow Councils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, given the short time frame envisaged for the Statutory Transition Committees, is he is still planning to introduce Shadow Councils in 2014.
(AQO 3542/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Executive believes it is essential to provide for a shadow period prior to the new councils assuming their full range of powers and functions.

The Statutory Transition Committees, which will come into effect in May/June 2013, will play a key role taking forward convergence work and in gathering information for the use of successor councils in shadow form, to enable the new councils to "hit the ground running" as quickly as possible following the next local government elections. The new councils will, during the shadow period, use the information and advice provided by Statutory Transition Committees to aid them in taking key decisions in the run down to assuming their full range of powers and functions on 1 April 2015.

Some key tasks for completion during the shadow period will include: striking the rate for 2015/16; agreeing a budget for the new councils; deciding upon the name and status of the new councils, and agreeing key documents such as the corporate and business plan of the new councils.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Northern Ireland Departments: Employee Childcare Provision

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what Departments are doing to provide childcare for their employees.
(AQW 19791/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Departments do not provide childcare for civil servants. They will however reimburse staff for the costs of additional registered childcare if they are required to attend work outside their normal work pattern, in line with the provisions of the NICS HR Handbook

In addition, the Northern Ireland Civil Service operates a Salary Sacrifice Childcare Voucher Scheme to assist staff with the costs of registered childcare. Under this arrangement staff agree to sacrifice a proportion of their salary in order to receive vouchers that are used to pay for registered childcare.

Civil Service Pension Schemes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 19001/11-15, what the current contribution rates are for (i) employees; and (ii) the employer in the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme compared with the North/South Pension Scheme; and whether the intended alignment will include removal of final salary provision from the North/South scheme.
(AQW 20039/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Contribution levels in the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) are as follows:

(i) Employee			**(ii) Employer**	
Salary range (full-time equivalent)	**Classic members**	**Premium, classic plus and nuvos members**	**Salary range (full-time equivalent)**	
Under £15,000	1.50%	3.50%		
£15,001 - £21,000	2.10%	4.10%		
£21,001 - £30,000	2.70%	4.70%	To £23,099	18%

(i) Employee			(ii) Employer	
Salary range (full-time equivalent)	**Classic members**	**Premium, classic plus and nuvos members**	**Salary range (full-time equivalent)**	
£30,001 - £50,000	3.10%	5.10%	£23,100-46,899	20%
£50,001 - £60,000	3.50%	5.50%	£46,900-100,999	23.5%
Over £60,000	3.90%	5.90%	£101,000 +	25%

Contribution levels in the North/South Pension Scheme are as follows:

(i) Employee	(ii) Employer
1.5%	See below

A single employers' contribution rate for North/South Bodies is not available for the North/South Pension Scheme. The total pension costs for each body are disclosed in their annual accounts alongside wages and salary costs. These figures allow the computation of an effective employer's rate for each individual body, for example DFP sponsors one North/South Body, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). The effective employer's contribution rate for SEUPB in the calendar year 2011 was 31.2%.

The intended alignment will include removal of final salary provision from the North/South scheme, subject to transitional protection arrangements for existing members.

Public Sector Land or Property

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why surplus public sector land or property is offered first to other public sector bodies; and under what legislation or authority is this policy enforced.
(AQW 20081/11-15)

Mr Wilson: This advice is contained within my Department's policy documents Managing Public Money NI and Central Advisory Unit's Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland (March 2010 edition).

Once requirements are clearly identified and where it makes sound commercial and economic sense to do so, surplus public sector land or property is normally offered, in the first instance, to other public sector bodies at market value. This saves the public purse significant additional costs involved in having to locate and acquire alternative property, which would be costly both in time and money, particularly where the exercise of compulsory purchase powers might otherwise be necessary.

Unemployment

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people, currently registered as unemployed, have been out of work for a period of (i) up to six months; (ii) between six months and a year; (iii) between one and two years; (iv) between two and three years; (v) between three and four years; and (vi) over four years.
(AQW 20133/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and the information overleaf for unemployment by duration is not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around the estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The table overleaf is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits in Northern Ireland at January 2013 disaggregated by the requested durations.

Table 1 – NI Claimant Count by Duration at January 2013

Duration	Total
0-6 Months	33,225
6-12 Months	15,110
12-24 Months	13,575
24-36 Months	2,725
36-48 Months	615
48+ Months	335
NI Total	65,590

This table may not add up due to roundings.

Unemployment

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people registered as unemployed for two or more years are aged (i) under 25; (ii) 25-35; (iii) 35-45; and (iv) over 45.
(AQW 20134/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and the information attached for unemployment by age and duration is not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around such estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The table overleaf is sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits in Northern Ireland at January 2013 for two or more years, disaggregated by the requested age groups.

Table 1 – NI Claimant Count by Age at January 2013 for claimants claiming two or more years.

Age	Total claiming for two or more years
Under 25	225
25-34	875
35-44	940
45 and Over	1,635
NI Total	**3,675**

Narrow Water Bridge

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he will make an announcement on whether his Department has approved INTERREG IVA Programme funding for the Narrow Water Bridge.
(AQW 20149/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Narrow Water Bridge project is currently seeking funding through the INTERREG IVA Programme and DFP are the accountable department in Northern Ireland.

DFP is currently involved in the process of critically reviewing the project. In addition, input has been sought and received from interested departments, DOE and DRD, to ensure the project can fully comply with all requirements imposed.

The project must fully progress through the agreed assessment process and all issues satisfactorily dealt with before a decision can be taken.

Titanic Signature Building

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps were taken to ensure that the tendering process surrounding the Titanic Signature Building was compliant with EU tendering requirements.
(AQW 20181/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) advised the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) in relation to the procurement of the Titanic Signature Building (TSB). This procurement was covered by the requirements of The Public Contract Regulations 2006 (the Regulations).

DETI took the view that there was no other realistic or feasible location, other than the site on which the TSB is located. The TSB could not be constructed without the consent of the leasehold owner of the site, Titanic Quarter Limited (TQL). TQL was not prepared to relinquish its exclusive rights to the site to enable competitive tendering of the development.

In these circumstances - where the contracting authority does not have a choice between different tenderers when awarding a contract - direct negotiation with one contractor can be used. Compliance of this approach with the Regulations was confirmed by legal counsel.

CPD therefore recommended that DETI award a contract to TQL on the basis of a single tender negotiation.

Public Spending Schemes: Sub-contractors and Suppliers

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the measures which are being undertaken by his Department to protect sub-contractors and suppliers in public spending schemes; and what is entailed in the proposed Project Bank Accounts.
(AQW 20222/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On 15 November 2012 the Procurement Board, which I chair, endorsed measures to protect subcontractors and suppliers in government construction contracts. The measures include:

- Ensuring that contractors are paid within 10 days of the date of their invoice;

- Ensuring that all contractors are signed up to the Construction Industry Forum Northern Ireland (CIFNI) Fair Payment Charter;
- Ensuring that Project Managers check that subcontractors and suppliers are being paid promptly; and
- Ensuring that government contracts are not awarded to contractors who:
  - are in administration;
  - habitually fail to pay their subcontractors and suppliers promptly; or
  - submit abnormally low tenders or sub-economic tenders.

On 12 December 2012 I wrote to my Ministerial colleagues asking them to introduce these measures in their departments and Centres of Procurement Expertise.

Project Bank Accounts (PBAs) were introduced in January 2013 for all new construction contracts tendered by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) that have an estimated value of over £1million and a significant subcontracting element.

A Project Bank Account is a bank account which holds the money in trust for the supply chain. This helps to protect the money in the event of administration or receivership and accelerates payment to the supply chain. Suppliers, including the main contractor, are paid simultaneously, usually within five days of the contracting authority depositing funds into the Project Bank Account.

DFP: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20261/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are currently six posts in the Department's Information Service, consisting of five Information Officer posts and one administrative support post. However, due to staff turnover, two of the Information Officer posts are currently vacant.

In the financial year 2011/12, the latest complete year for which information is available, the total cost of Information Service staff in DFP was £228,878.

Narrow Water Bridge

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the motion agreed by the Assembly on 4 December 2012, for an update on the provision of funding for the Narrow Water Bridge project.
(AQW 20301/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At the Assembly debate on the 4 December 2012 the factors influencing the decision making process for the Narrow Water Bridge project were clearly outlined. A decision on the project could not be prejudged and the costs, benefits, value for money, deliverability and risk would be key issues in the assessment process being undertaken by the department. This remains the position.

DFP is currently undertaking an internal critical review of the project. This process also involves input and discussion with DRD and DOE as policy responsible departments for elements of the proposal. These departments must also ensure the project adheres with relevant statutory undertakings.

DFP officials have and will continue to progress the project through the assessment process in a timely manner. A decision on the project will be taken when all information is in place to do so.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on support services for patients with myalgic encephalomyelitis.
(AQW 19949/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I have been advised by the Health and Social Care Board that an outline service model has been developed for patients with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) with input from patients, carers and service providers. The key elements of the model are: a designated clinical lead for ME/CFS in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust; a regional network of expertise; and, the provision of systematic programmes to support patients to manage their condition.

It is anticipated that a draft commissioning specification will be drawn up by the end of March 2013 which will guide the implementation of the service model in each Local Commissioning Group area to ensure consistency across Northern Ireland.

The Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency will work with HSC Trusts to develop a regional care pathway and network. Following on from this HSC Trusts and primary care will work together to ensure that local care pathways are implemented, consistent with the model.

Health Infrastructure Board

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15307/11-15, for an update on the Health Infrastructure Board, particularly in relation to the development the Health and Social Care campus for Derry.
(AQW 19955/11-15)

Mr Poots: As previously indicated, the HSCB consultation document on 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' included an illustrative model of 'hub and spoke' Health and Care Centres, which included Waterside and City side.

The HSCB is currently analysing all of the consultation responses for Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action and will report to my Department shortly on the findings of this consultation. I will then review the HSCB's consultation report and will make an announcement on the way forward.

The Health Infrastructure Board is continuing to explore alternative funding models to support this programme of work. Future developments in this area will be dependent on the outcome of both this work and the TYC consultation process and will be subject to the normal business case approval process.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Legal Advice Costs

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has spent on legal advice for issues that have arisen through their complaints department, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 19959/11-15)

Mr Poots: The spend by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on legal advice for issues that have arisen through their complaints department, in each of the last five years, is set out in the table below:

2011/12	2010/11	2009/1	2008/09	2007/08
£263	£287	£2,512	£984	£346

Prisoners: Illegal Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times prisoners have been treated for the effects of illegal drugs in each of the last five years, broken down by prison facility, including HMP Hydebank Young Offenders Centre.
(AQW 19979/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has been responsible for the delivery of healthcare services in NI Prison Service establishments since 1 April 2008. However, due to the fact that prisoners are often moved around all three prison establishments, it is not possible to break the requested statistics into specific locations. Information on the number of prisoners who have been treated for the effects of illegal drugs is set out in the table below.

Year	Number of prisoners treated for the effects of illegal drugs
2008	17
2009	14
2010	30
2011	35
2012	40

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Paramedics

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of hours worked by paramedics in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each month of the last three years; and what is the forecast of the number of hours which will be worked in each of the next twelve months.
(AQW 20022/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is not available in the format requested and could only be obtained by the NI Ambulance Services Trust at a disproportionate cost. However the Trust has provided the number of hours worked by Paramedics, Paramedics in Training and Emergency Medical Technicians based in stations and deployment points which are located within the South Eastern Local Commissioning Group area as follows:

	Actual Number of Hours Worked			Forecast Number of Hours that will be Worked	
	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2012-2013	2013-2014
Apr	10480.15	10919.15	10291.25		10319.00
May	10988.45	11241.22	10783.42		10703.30
Jun	10589.30	11211.25	10642.20		10314.00
Jul	10849.30	10534.53	10587.22		10669.00
Aug	10576.00	11023.00	10080.55		10696.30
Sep	10950.00	11057.37	10240.12		10309.30
Oct	10676.45	11299.49	10930.22		10680.30
Nov	10224.30	10911.19	10567.04		10346.30
Dec	10109.17	10855.28	10370.51		10648.00
Jan	10369.55	10758.23	10513.34		10703.30
Feb	9876.45	10406.13	N/A	9760.00	
Mar	11356.50	11091.00	N/A	10771.30	
Total	**127,048.02 Hours**	**131,309.44 Hours**	**105,007.47 Hours**		**125,921.30 Hours**

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what self-management programmes are available for people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in each Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 20029/11-15)

Mr Poots: People diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis are supported through a variety of ways to self manage their condition. This may include access to structured patient education programmes, but often will involve information and self management advice provided on a one to one basis. For example, specialist MS nurses will often meet with people who are newly diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis to provide them with information and guidance to help them self manage their condition and will continue to be available to provide ongoing advice and support according to an individual's needs and wishes as their condition evolves.

Currently, there is no comprehensive dataset of the number and type of dedicated structured patient education and self-management programmes available across Northern Ireland for people with long term conditions, including those with Multiple Sclerosis.

However, my Department has a Programme for Government commitment which is to enrol people with a long term condition (and who want to be enrolled) on a dedicated chronic condition management programme. The year one milestone for 2012-13 is to identify patient education and self-management programmes that are in place in each HSC Trust area, including information about the number and type of programmes, provider organisations, and the number of attendees. My officials are working with the Public Health Agency to establish a dataset of such programmes for the baseline year 2011-12, and this is on target for completion by 31 March 2013.

Once in place, this will help inform priorities for commissioning of patient education and self management programmes into the future. Arrangements will also be put in place to monitor progress against the PfG commitment over time, including the number and type of patient education and self management programmes available.

Electrophysiology Procedures

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17786/11-15, how recent staffing changes at the Southern Health and Social Care Trust will affect the delivery of future electrophysiology (EP) procedures and the additional proposed sessions; and for a breakdown of patient waiting times for EP tests.
(AQW 20033/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust that an Electrophysiology (EP) clinician will be leaving in April 2013 and the Trust is currently working to fill this vacancy. Additional sessions commenced in January 2013 and additional capacity has also been secured from the Independent Sector for this service. The Trust is working with the Health and Social Care Board to retain and further expand this capacity during 2013/14.

A breakdown of the numbers waiting for an EP test is given in the table below.

Weeks waiting	Number of patients[1]
0 – 9 weeks	13
>9 – 13 weeks	14
>13 – 21 weeks	27
>21 – 26 weeks	11
>26 – 36 weeks	29
> 36 weeks	44

1 This information has been supplied by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Paramedics: Non-driving Duties

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many paramedics, who have been employed in the last five years, are restricted to non-driving duties because of medical conditions.
(AQW 20035/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Year	Number of Paramedics/Paramedic Supervisors restricted to non-driving duties because of medical conditions
2007/08	5
2008/09	4
2009/10	4
2010/11	4
2011/12	7

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service: Drivers

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many paramedics and emergency vehicle drivers in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service have lost their driving licence in the past five years because of (i) alcohol related offences; and (ii) other traffic offences; and how many of these personnel are still serving as paramedics in the service.
(AQW 20036/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has advised that three paramedics were disqualified from driving in the past five years because of alcohol related offences of whom two remain employed as paramedics. One emergency vehicle driver was disqualified for another traffic offence.

Fire Stations: Cushendall

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Cushendall has not yet been provided with a new fire station; and what is the timescale for providing this facility.
(AQW 20040/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Cushendall Fire Station is not sufficiently high up the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service list of priorities to be funded in the current budget period. Until decisions are made on priorities for the next budget period, it is not possible to set a timescale for this project.

Crèche and Daycare Facilities: North Down Constituency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) crèche and daycare facilities in the North Down constituency; (ii) children registered at each facility; and (iii) children on the waiting list for each facility.
(AQW 20044/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below details the number of crèche and daycare facilities in the North Down constituency

Parliamentary Constituency	Day Nurseries	Out of Schools	Crèches	Playgroups	Total
North Down	19	6	3	30	**58**

It is not possible to provide detail on the number of children registered at each facility or waiting lists for each establishment as this information is not held by HSC Trusts.

Organ Donors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many registered organ donors there were in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20046/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested has been supplied by NHS Blood and Transplant, which is the organ donation organisation for the UK and is responsible for matching and allocating donated organs.

The information is shown in the following table –

Date	Total number on the organ donor register	New registrations [1]	Registrations still on the organ donor register
31/03/2007	377,533		
31/03/2008	396,718	36,451	36,301
31/03/2009	440,123	43,394	43,275
31/03/2010	477,150	37,419	37,307
31/03/2011	485,050	14,492	14,431
31/03/2012	521,040	36,570	36,479
19/02/2013	547,774	27,260	27,219

Note: 1 excluding duplicate withdrawals and withdrawals registered in error. 2 registrations in the period 1 April 2012 to 19 February 2013.

Example, the total on the ODR as at 31/03/2007 was 377,533 and there were 36,451 new registrations between 01/04/2007 and 31/03/2008. But the numbers will not add up to 396,718 due to withdrawals due to death or other reasons. 36,301 out of 36,451 registrations were still on the ODR as at 19/02/2013 and are included in the total of 547,774.

Organ Donors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many new people have joined the organ donor list in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20048/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested has been supplied by NHS Blood and Transplant, which is the organ donation organisation for the UK and is responsible for matching and allocating donated organs.

The information is shown in the following table –

Date	Total number on the organ donor register	New registrations [1]	Registrations still on the organ donor register
31/03/2007	377,533		
31/03/2008	396,718	36,451	36,301
31/03/2009	440,123	43,394	43,275
31/03/2010	477,150	37,419	37,307
31/03/2011	485,050	14,492	14,431
31/03/2012	521,040	36,570	36,479
19/02/2013	547,774	27,260	27,219

Note: 1 excluding duplicate withdrawals and withdrawals registered in error. 2 registrations in the period 1 April 2012 to 19 February 2013.

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IVF Treatment

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has considered providing three full cycles of IVF treatment to couples, as recommended in National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines.
(AQW 20057/11-15)

Mr Poots: The 2004 NICE guidelines on fertility treatment recommended that eligible couples should be offered up to three stimulated cycles of treatment. As this was published before my Department entered into an agreement with NICE in July 2006, the guidelines have not been endorsed for Northern Ireland.

Currently, although we aspire to provide up to three cycles of treatment as recommended by the 2004 NICE guidelines, financial restrictions make this unachievable. Currently we provide one publicly funded treatment to those who meet the criteria and, from 1 April 2012, one frozen embryo transfer is also offered to new referrals who meet the clinical criteria. To increase the number of individual treatments provided within current funding could limit the number of women who could access the service.

NICE has recently published revised guidelines on fertility, which updates and replaces the 2004 guidelines. These guidelines will now be considered by my Department for their applicability to Health and Social Care service provision in Northern Ireland. We will reach a view on this as soon as possible.

Water: Fluoridation

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to add fluoride to the water supply.
(AQW 20075/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am still considering my position on fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and continue to consult with Executive colleagues on the matter before I come to a decision.

If a proposal to fluoridate the water supplies is made, the appropriate evidence from reputable scientific and medical sources will be considered, and we are required under The Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to consult and ascertain public opinion. Should such a consultation proceed, we would welcome the views of all interested parties, at that time.

Crisis Centres and Service Providers for Victims

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the increase in incidents of domestic violence, whether any additional funding will be made available for crisis centres and service providers for victims.
(AQW 20091/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department provides funding for organisations and projects with a regional focus and in this context Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland as a regional organisation, receives core funding for central administration costs. In addition to this, my Department also contributes funding towards the running of the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline.

Work is underway to appoint a service provider for the provision of an

independent advocacy service for potential high risk victims of domestic violence across Northern Ireland. My Department will contribute towards the running costs of this service.

My Department does not directly fund health and social care related services provided by local groups; these services are supported by the Health and Social Care Trusts for the delivery of appropriate services.

Emergency Ambulances: Paramedics

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to remove paramedic assistants from emergency ambulances and replace them with drivers, leaving only one paramedic staffing emergency ambulances.
(AQW 20102/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no Paramedic Assistants in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust. The reform and modernisation of the ambulance service is primarily a matter for the Chief Executive and Board of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust. In considering the potential for any change to the provision of emergency ambulance services I would expect the Trust to reflect on best practice in relation to the workforce and the required skills and scope of practice to ensure safe and effective patient care.

Rapid Response Vehicles

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is a difference in the criteria for Rapid Response Vehicles used locally compared with those used in England.
(AQW 20110/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised that there are some differences between rapid response vehicles (RRVs) working in Northern Ireland and those operating in England. This can include different vehicle profiles, specifications, hours of operation and suitability of calls.

In addition, all NIAS RRVs are crewed by highly skilled paramedics who perform a wide range of clinical interventions, whereas those in England may be crewed by lower grade emergency medical technicians. Furthermore, NIAS RRVs operate between 08:00hrs and midnight whereas some Ambulance Trusts in England operate RRVs on a 24hr basis.

Rapid Response Vehicles: Lone Worker Policy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the lone worker policy will impact on the use of Rapid Response Vehicles.
(AQW 20112/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) introduced a formal lone worker policy in 2007 following recommendations from its Health and Safety Committee. However, NIAS already had lone worker and dispatch procedures in place since 2003 to support its rapid response vehicle (RRV) paramedics.

NIAS reviewed these procedures during 2012 and is now working to amalgamate them into a more comprehensive Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for RRVs. NIAS does not expect the revised SOP to have any impact on the RRV response model which has now been in place for 10 years. It remains the case that RRV paramedics can be stood down from certain calls, for example those that might place them at risk of harm.

Rapid Response Vehicles

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, over the last twelve months, what was the average time that Rapid Response Vehicles had to remain at a call out whilst waiting for an ambulance to arrive, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 20113/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the average time between the arrival of a Rapid Response Vehicle (RRV) to a call out and the arrival of a conveying A&E ambulance is provided by Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust in the table below1:

HSC Trust	**Average Time from Arrival of a Rapid Response Vehicle until Arrival of an A&E Conveying Ambulance (01/02/2012 – 31/01/2013)2**
Belfast	00:14:28
Northern	00:13:26
South Eastern	00:16:20
Southern	00:12:39
Western	00:11:22
Total	**00:14:06**

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Health & Social Care Trust

1 These figures should not be interpreted as 'waiting times' as RRV paramedics will provide life sustaining care including defibrillation, airway protection and drug administration until the conveying A&E ambulance arrives.

2 Includes all Emergency and Urgent calls where a RRV arrived at the scene of the incident and was followed by a conveying ambulance.

Ambulances

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances are available in each Health and Social Care Trust; and how many of these ambulances are used to provide cover in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 20114/11-15)

Mr Poots: Ambulances are stationed in particular locations across Northern Ireland, with allocation based on the nearest available appropriate ambulance at any given time, resulting in resources crossing over HSC Trust boundaries on a daily

basis. It should therefore be noted that the number of ambulances available in each HSC Trust does not reflect the cover provided at any given time.

Information on the number of emergency ambulance vehicles available at ambulance stations within each division/HSC Trust area is shown in the table below:

Division / HSC Trust	Number
Belfast	15
South Eastern	21
Northern	32
Southern	22
Western	24
Total	**114**

Source: Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Health & Social Care Trust

It is not possible to accurately detail the number of ambulances used to provide cover in the Belfast HSC Trust as cover and availability vary due to changeable factors and could only be measured at a point in time.

Intensive Care Units

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Intensive Care Units that were operational in each of the last five years; and how many units there were per million of the population.
(AQW 20123/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of intensive care units that were operational in each of the last five years and the number of units per million of the population are detailed below;

Year	Number of Intensive Care Units	NI Population	Rate Per 1,000,000 Population
2007/08	12	1,759,148	6.8
2008/09	12	1,775,003	6.8
2009/10	12	1,788,896	6.7
2010/11	12	1,799,392	6.7
2011/12	12	1,806,873	6.6

Source: HSC Trusts, NISRA GRO

Ovarian Cancer

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what advice his Department issues to GPs regarding the early detection of ovarian cancer.
(AQW 20138/11-15)

Mr Poots: In May 2012 my Department endorsed NICE Clinical Guideline CG122 – The recognition and initial management of ovarian cancer. The Department passed this to the HSC Board for dissemination to service providers including GPs.

The HSC Board draft Commissioning Plan for 2013/14, which is to be considered and approved by my Department, includes reference to NICE CG122 on ovarian cancer.

Ovarian Cancer

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women have been diagnosed with the early stages of ovarian cancer in each year since 2010.
(AQW 20147/11-15)

Mr Poots: ANSWER (input from Northern Ireland Cancer Registry)

The table below gives the number of women diagnosed with both the early and advanced stages of ovarian cancer in each year since 2010.

The number of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer (ICD-10 C56) in N. Ireland in the years 2010 and 2011, by stage of disease

	Number of women	
	Year of diagnosis	
Stage group	**2010**	**2011**
FIGO I (Early stage)	25	41
FIGO II	10	6
FIGO III	49	58
FIGO IV (Late stage)	35	31
Unknown stage	14	16
Total	**133**	**152**

* For a listing and explanation of ICD10 topology or site codes see: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, World Health Organisation, Geneva. Or view online at http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2010/en#/II

Ovarian Cancer

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women have been diagnosed with advanced stage ovarian cancer in each year since 2010.
(AQW 20148/11-15)

Mr Poots: ANSWER (input from Northern Ireland Cancer Registry)

The table below gives the number of women diagnosed with both the early and advanced stages of ovarian cancer in each year since 2010.

The number of women diagnosed with ovarian cancer (ICD-10 C56) in N. Ireland in the years 2010 and 2011, by stage of disease

	Number of women	
	Year of diagnosis	
Stage group	**2010**	**2011**
FIGO I (Early stage)	25	41
FIGO II	10	6
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FIGO IV (Late stage)	35	31
Unknown stage	14	16
Total	**133**	**152**

* For a listing and explanation of ICD10 topology or site codes see: International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, Tenth Revision, World Health Organisation, Geneva. Or view online at http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd10/browse/2010/en#/II

Childhood Adversity

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People report ''Still Vulnerable - the impact of early childhood experiences on adolescent suicide and accidental death''.
(AQW 20163/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcome the publication of the report by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. It supports the findings of an overview report commissioned and launched by my department earlier this year. The overview report analysed the findings of a number of case reviews undertaken by the Regional Child Protection Committee following the death or serious injury of children, in circumstances where abuse was a known or suspected factor. Key learning points from the overview report will be taken forward by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) which came into operation in September last year. Within its draft Strategic Plan, the SBNI has identified as a strategic priority the need to improve inter and intra-agency assessment processes to ensure that they take account of children's experience of multiple adversities as well as focusing on individual incidents.

If we are going to be able to respond effectively to childhood adversity, we need to build and strengthen parental capacity. My Department's Families Matter strategy recognises the need for parents and families to be supported in bringing up their children, particularly through the provision of early intervention support mechanisms such as Family Support Hubs. We are in the process of establishing Family Support Hubs across Northern Ireland. The objective of each Hub is to enhance awareness, accessibility, co-ordination and provision of family support resources in local areas, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Regrettably, as demonstrated by the Commissioner's report, too many young people die each year in Northern Ireland following suicide or accidental death. It is essential that Departments work together to provide services which intervene earlier in a sustained and co-ordinated approach to reduce these tragic incidents. We published the Protect Life Strategy in June 2012 and the Public Health Agency (PHA) has in place a training action plan for suicide awareness and mental health promotion which seeks to deliver and improve uptake of training by those in "gateway" positions such as GPs, A&E staff, teachers, youth workers, youth custody officers and sports coaches.

Finally, a number of the recommendations in the Commissioner's report were directed at my department in conjunction with the Health and Social Care Board, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, the Public Health Agency or the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. These are actively being considered.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Meal Costs

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number and average cost of (i) breakfasts; (ii) lunches; and (iii) dinners served in (a) hospitals; and (b) nursing and residential care homes, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area over the last 12 months.
(AQW 20167/11-15)

Mr Poots: The data is not currently held centrally.

However, the action plan accompanying the recently issued "Strategic Framework for the Delivery of Health & Social Care Catering Services" includes a plan to collect more accurate, more detailed management information on catering costs.

Epilepsy

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are in place to help people who have epilepsy.
(AQW 20177/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board that epilepsy services are provided locally in the five HSC Trusts, either through their local neurology service and/or via the outreach neurology service provided by the Belfast HSC Trust. More complex cases are referred to the regional neurology service for assessment and further management if required e.g. neurosurgery / neuroradiology. There is a pre-pregnancy clinic, in the Belfast HSC Trust, for women with epilepsy who are planning pregnancy.

The majority of children with epilepsy are cared for by paediatricians, in conjunction with general practitioners and the primary care team. As much care and support as possible is normally provided close to a child's home and this will include services such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy if they are necessary. Children who require specialist care may be seen at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, where a paediatric neurology team is skilled in the management of more severe epilepsy. They may also be referred to other centres in the UK, such as Great Ormond Street Hospital for specialist expert assessment, advice or ongoing management, depending on their needs.

Tooth Decay: Children in North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the numbers of children being treated for tooth decay in North Down, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20179/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available.

Drug Addictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what strategies are being pursued to reduce the number of people with drug addictions.
(AQW 20196/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2012, I launched the revised cross-departmental strategy to prevent and address the harm related to alcohol and drug, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. Approximately £8 million is allocated to its implementation each year, and additional funding is provided through the mental health budget for the provision of treatment and support services.

The NSD seeks to direct action across five pillars: education, prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research. It also contains a number of priority areas for action including: developing a regional commissioning framework for alcohol and drug services; tackling drug-related

anti-social behaviour; targeting those at risk and vulnerable; reducing the availability of illicit drugs; and addressing local community issues.

A range of services is available across Northern Ireland that support the NSD Phase 2 and details of these can be found online at: http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/drug-and-alcohol-directories-services.

Drug Addictions: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the number of people in North Down who have a drug addiction; and how many of these people are receiving treatment for drug addiction.
(AQW 20197/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people in North Down who have a drug addiction; and are receiving treatment for drug addiction is not available within the Department.

The Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index holds information on all those persons registered in concurrence with the Misuse of Drugs (Notification of and Supply to Addicts) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1973. It should be noted that addiction as measured by the Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index does not mean that those people are being treated for their addiction. Information on the Northern Ireland Drug Addicts Index is not available at Constituency level, therefore the number of patients registered at Trust level is given. The latest information available relates to 2011 when there were 23 registered addicts in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area.

Information on individuals presenting to treatment services with problem drug use is collected on the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database (DMD). The DMD holds information on problem drug users presenting to treatment services for the first time, or for the first time in six months or more. A problem drug user is defined as a person who experiences social, psychological, physical or legal problems (related to intoxication and/or regular excessive consumption and/or dependence) as a consequence of their own use of drugs or chemical substances. It is important to note that being in treatment for problem drug use does not necessarily constitute addiction. Information on the Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database is not available at Constituency level, therefore the number of problem drug users presenting to treatment services at Trust level is given. The latest information available relates to 2011/12 when there were 430 problem drug users who presented to treatment services based within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area.

DHSSPS: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20214/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is shown in the table.

Table: DHSSPS Information Office Staffing and Cost

Information Officers	7
General Administrative Staff	3
Annual Cost (2011/12)	£352,692

Information Officers provide a professional communications service - including media, online and advertising services - with office support by general administration staff.

Patients: Residential and Nursing Care Sector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment tools are utilised in determining the care needs of patients in the residential and nursing care sector; and how this is translated into deciding the appropriate level of financial support.
(AQW 20312/11-15)

Mr Poots: Assessment via care management is the way in which complex need and risks are managed by HSC Trusts in terms of longer term placement decisions.

The Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT), developed primarily in relation to assessing the needs of older people and now being used in some physical and sensory disability programmes, was designed to support the exercise of professional judgement in the care management process. The tool is structured in component parts and uses domains which can be completed according to the level of health and social care needs experienced, from non-complex to complex. Use of the tool is intended to promote consistency of access to high quality services across Northern Ireland.

A financial assessment should only commence after an assessment of the service user's health and social care needs has been completed. The Health and Personal Social Services (Assessment of Resources) Regulations (NI) 1993 set out the form of the financial assessment used to determine how much an individual is required to contribute toward the cost of social care provided in a residential care or nursing home.

Full information on the care management process, the provision of services including placement of service users in residential care or nursing homes, and guidance on charging for social care provided in the residential care and nursing home sector is available in Circular HSC (ECCU) 1/2010, issued by my Department in March 2010.

The circular can be accessed using the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-eccu-1-2010.pdf

Meningitis B Vaccine, Bexsero

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Meningitis immunisation Bexsero will be made available to families.
(AQW 20315/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vaccination policy in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is guided by the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers on matters relating to the provision of vaccination and immunisation services. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered.

The JCVI has begun an evaluation of the impact and cost-effectiveness of possible meningitis B vaccination strategies. This evaluation requires a complex analysis and final JCVI advice is not expected until later in the year. I will consider the JCVI recommendation when I have received it.

Private Clinics

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the procedures under which the Health Service refers patients to private clinics; and the cost of contracting these services to private clinics.
(AQW 20462/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board that the Health Service refers patients to the Independent Sector: either as an Extra Contractual Referral (ECR) where a clinician can demonstrate an exceptional clinical need to do so; or where it is not possible (for clinical reasons) to deliver a local service; or under the Elective Reform Initiative (Waiting List Initiatives) where there is a gap between the demand for a service and the capacity a HSC Trust can offer. Generally, the Board's preferred option is that HSC Trusts should offer additional "in house" (i.e. HSC based) activity but the Board will fund Independent Sector transfers at the Trust's request where additional in house capacity cannot be offered.

The HSC Board spends approximately £25m each year in transferring patients for treatment under the ECR process, of which around £6m p.a. would be spent with Independent Sector providers. Under the Elective Reform Initiative, funding for transfers to Independent Sector providers in 2011/12 was £52.6m.

Abortion

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the outcome of the departmental monitoring of the recorded reasons for abortions within the Health Service; and what the monitoring results reveal.
(AQW 20607/11-15)

Mr Poots: Work on the development of an information system to provide additional detail on the grounds for termination of pregnancies carried out in Northern Ireland is continuing. It is my intention that any new system will collect robust and consistent information from independent providers in addition to health and social care organisations. Officials are currently addressing how this can best be achieved.

The Department continues to collect statistics on the number of terminations of pregnancy carried out in Health and Social Care facilities in Northern Ireland.

Department of Justice

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Competency Framework

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the current status of the proposed Competency Framework for all management grades, custody officers and offender supervisors.
(AQW 19927/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is currently carrying out an exercise to determine the most appropriate competency framework to put in place for operational management grades, custody officers and offender supervisors.

The competency framework is currently under review and it is being developed alongside role descriptions.

Prisons: Provision of Audio and Electrical Goods

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17217/11-15, to provide a breakdown of what is available under the term audio/electrical goods.
(AQW 19932/11-15)

Mr Ford: Audio/electrical goods which are available under the current contract are CD players, hair clippers, shavers, radios, desk lamps, DVD players, digital recorders, freeview boxes, TVs, hairdryers, straighteners, portable music systems, digital TV receivers, lamp bulbs, a kettle, a playstation, headphones and video players.

Each prison establishment will provide audio/electrical goods which reflect the diversity of their prisoner population.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Procurement of Televisions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to televisions bought by the Prison Service, to detail (i) the date of the most recent order; (ii) how many televisions were purchased; (iii) the specifications of the televisions; and (iv) the total cost.
(AQW 19935/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service last placed an order for 30 19 inch LED flat screen televisions with its contracted supplier on 7 February 2013.

In line with Commercial in Confidence guidelines, I cannot divulge pricing as this would disadvantage the supplier in any future tendering process.

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to allegations that a prison officer planted details about Governor Steve Rodford in a republican prisoner's cell at Maghaberry, whether the matter was reported to the PSNI for investigation.
(AQW 19968/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that the matter was reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for investigation.

Police and Crime Commissioners: Injury on Duty Award Reviews

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many police forces in other parts of the UK automatically carry out Injury on Duty Award reviews at the age of 65.
(AQW 19991/11-15)

Mr Ford: This information is not readily available. There are 43 Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), formerly police authorities, in England and Wales and Police Authorities in Scotland. Regulations place a duty on them individually to decide when to carry out reviews of Injury on Duty awards at the age of 65.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice who made the decision that Kenneth Douglas was fit for release.
(AQW 20041/11-15)

Mr Ford: Decisions on the release of life sentence prisoners are taken by a multi disciplinary case conference typically including representatives from the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and an independent psychotherapist.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Compliance Audits of Disciplinary Procedures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of times that the Northern Ireland Prison Service carried out compliance audits in respect of (i) the conduct and discipline of staff, with particular emphasis on adherence to the Code of Conduct and Discipline including scrutiny of the conduct/standard of investigations comprising allegations of gross misconduct; (ii) the scrutiny of the conduct of Adjudications by Governors; and (iii) the scrutiny of appeals determined by senior Northern Ireland Prison Service management.
(AQW 20042/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not carry out formal compliance audits of disciplinary procedures. However, where considered necessary, internal reviews have been carried out in respect of individual cases to ensure that the conduct and discipline policies are complying in all areas of applicable legislation, and that those conducting the adjudications and hearing the appeals do so in accordance with current agreed guidelines.

Newly Qualified Prison Officers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when a newly qualified prison officer can have direct contact with prisoners.
(AQW 20055/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Custody Officers will have direct contact with Prisoners during their initial training and upon taking up their posting at their permanent station.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Voluntary Staff Exit Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of Northern Ireland Prison Service staff who successfully applied for the Voluntary Staff Exit Scheme, were members of the Prisoner Officers' Association.
(AQW 20067/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Officers' Association is an independent body and the Member may wish to write to it directly about this matter.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Assaults on Prison Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19302/11-15, whether he intends to revise his answer in light of the dismissal in November 2012 of a prison officer who was seriously assaulted by a prisoner and unable to return to work due to his injuries, and no post offering light duties was made available.
(AQW 20093/11-15)

Mr Ford: Due to the Data Protection Act 1998 it would not be appropriate to discuss an individual case.

Prisoners: Illegal Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to the recent BBC Spotlight programme, to clarify on how many occasions in the last two years notices have been posted in prisons to alert prisoners to illegal drugs in operation and who makes the decision to display these notices.
(AQW 20095/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 2011 the number of notices alerting prisoners to illegal drugs in operation which have been displayed in prison establishments is as follows:-

Magilligan Prison	5 notices
Maghaberry Prison	4 notices
Hydebank Wood	1 notice

The decision to issue these notices is taken by a member of staff at governor grade.

Prisoners: Supporting Prisoners-at-risk Process

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the reasons for the Supporting Prisoner at Risk process (i) not being viable for all vulnerable or at risk prisoners; and (ii) being operated using a system of potential risk grading.
(AQW 20096/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) The Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process adopts a multi-disciplinary approach which is specific to the care and management of individual prisoners who have self-harmed, or been identified as being at risk of self-harm or suicide. SPAR is not a 'one size fits all' system as it assists prison staff in assessing the individual needs of vulnerable prisoners during periods of immediate crisis.

(ii) At the SPAR multi-disciplinary case conferences, potential risk is assessed and appropriate interventions put in place to support the individualised care of the prisoner in distress.

PSNI: Equal Pay

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, following the success, in 2010, of an equal pay claim regarding a lead case by a part-time reserve police officer, who claimed less favourable treatment of fixed term employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, is there any distinction in how other officers awaiting settlement will have their cases funded.
(AQW 20103/11-15)

Mr Ford: Two individual cases were settled in 2010 on the merits of the individual circumstances in those cases. There are a number of other cases still awaiting listing in the Office of the Industrial Tribunal and it would be inappropriate to comment.

DOJ: Legal Advice Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how much his Department has spent on legal advice in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 20130/11-15)

Mr Ford: Expenditure on legal advice for the DOJ, including its agencies but not its arm's length bodies, for 2010/11 and 2011/12 is provided in the table below. However, this excludes the NI Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) as legal advice costs cannot be separated from total legal costs.

DOJ Body	2010/11	2011/12
Core Department	£3,195	£181,272
NI Prison Service	£1,763	£43,894
Compensation Agency	£397,727	£272,448
Youth Justice Agency	£8,184	£11,959
Forensic Science NI	0	0
Total	**£410,869**	**£509,573**

Expenditure on legal advice for 2012/13 cannot be provided as the Department and its agencies no longer record these costs separately.

Prisons: Meal Costs

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number and average cost of (i) breakfasts; (ii) lunches; and (iii) evening meals served in prisons over the last 12 months.
(AQW 20165/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total number of meals served in each establishment from 1 February 2012 to 31 January 2013 is detailed as below:

	Breakfast	Lunch	Evening Meal	Total Meals
Maghaberry	360,900	360,900	360,900	1,082,700
Hydebank	84,226	84,226	84,226	252,678
Magilligan	189,538	189,538	189,538	568,614
Totals	**634,664**	**634,664**	**634,664**	**1,903,992**

Each establishment has a daily budget of £2.71 to provide every prisoner with a breakfast, lunch and evening meal.

The average cost of breakfast is £0.51. Lunch and evening meal costs fluctuate daily but are a combined average of £2.20 daily.

Prisoner Ombudsman

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19334/11-15, when the remit of the Prisoner Ombudsman changed on such matters and where can the documentation be found.
(AQW 20180/11-15)

Mr Ford: Pursuant to my response to AQW 19334/11-15, the Prisoner Ombudsman's remit covering such matters has not changed.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Suspension From Duty Policy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19388/11-15, (i) to provide a copy of the Prison Service Suspension From Duty Policy for the period in question; (ii) how often each suspension from duty should be reviewed; (iii) whether all suspensions are reported to the Minister, as required by legislation; and (iv) to outline the relevance of point (iv) in his answer.
(AQW 20186/11-15)

Mr Ford: Operational staff employed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) are suspended from duty in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Each case of suspension is reviewed on an individual basis as outlined in the Notification of Suspension Form; the applicable conditions of which are agreed between the Governor and the individual suspended from duty.

I am notified of all cases of suspensions imposed on operational grades by NIPS.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Suspensions From Duty

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 19230/11-15 and AQW 18652/11-15, (i) to detail the number of cases in which the Ombudsman provided information to the Director General or Deputy that resulted in suspensions from duty or disciplinary investigations; (ii) on receipt of such information, in how many cases the Prison Service conducted preliminary

inquiries prior to directing disciplinary investigations; (iii) how many meetings concerning staff who would be subject to disciplinary procedures took place between the Ombudsman, the Director General or Deputy; (iv) in how many cases the Ombudsman requested CCTV footage for examination retrospective to the deaths; and (v) at what point prison staff were made aware that the Ombudsman was investigating CCTV footage.
(AQW 20187/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) I refer the Member to the responses provided to AQW 18562/11-15 and part (v) of AQW 19230/11-15 and reiterate that the Prison Service has not suspended individuals on the basis of discussions between the Prisoner Ombudsman and the Director General or Deputy Director General, however suspensions and disciplinary proceedings have followed on receipt of reports from the Prisoner Ombudsman.

(ii) In accordance with the current Code of Conduct and Discipline it is essential that preliminary inquiries are carried out to establish facts prior to directing any internal disciplinary investigations;

(iii) Meetings are not convened with the Prisoner Ombudsman to discuss staff subject to disciplinary procedures;

(iv) CCTV footage is an important source of independent evidence and it is normal practice for the Ombudsman to request this following a death in custody and/or in circumstances where this may assist in a complaint or serious incident investigation; and

(v) The Northern Ireland Prison Service would be aware at the point at which such a request is made.

Prisons: Televisions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 18499/11-15, to detail the incidents where televisions have been damaged during prison riots over the last five years.
(AQW 20188/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the last five years there have been no incidents within the Prison Service recorded as a riot. Detailed information is not readily available regarding individual items damaged during any indiscipline and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

DOJ: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20216/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were twenty-one members of staff employed in the Department and it's Agencies' Information Services as at January 2013, nine of whom are administrative staff who provide a media monitoring service for all of the Executive Departments and public bodies through Service Level Agreements. The full time equivalent staffing figure (FTE) is 19.6.

The annual salary cost of this service is £703,741.99 approximately.

The responsibilities of the twenty-one staff are as outlined below:

Number of staff	Responsibility
9	Information Officers on loan from the Executive Information Service.
9	Administrative staff who provide a media monitoring service for the Department of Justice, other NI Departments and public bodies through service level agreements.
3	General service grades who provide a press office function within the NI Courts and Tribunal Service.

Prisons: Security and Cleaning Services

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the contractors, including contract costs, that provide security and/or cleaning services in each prison, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20268/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details a list of the contractors that have provided security and/or cleaning in each prison in each of the last five years. For security reasons the names of the contractors have been withheld:

Contractor	Activity	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
A	Maghaberry - Security to Restricted Construction Site	-	-	15,000	75,000	46,000

Contractor	Activity	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
B	Maghaberry - Specialist Cleaning – Dirty Protest/ Cell Clean + Bloods	7,500	7,500	72,650	195,044	509,423
B	Magilligan – Cell Clean + Bloods	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
C	Working Out Unit Belfast – Security	-	-	-	68,100	65,295
C	Millisle - Security	-	-	-	35,151	61,581

Court Estate Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice how the available resources will be spent when disposal of surplus court estate properties has been completed.
(AQW 20310/11-15)

Mr Ford: The utilisation of any funds generated from the disposal of surplus court estate will be considered as part of my Department's Estate Strategy which is under development.

Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice to detail what consultation took place before advertising the vacancy for Chair of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation.
(AQW 20333/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no statutory requirement to consult in relation to this appointment, which is being conducted in accordance with CPANI guidance. DOJ officials did however receive correspondence in relation to the terms and conditions relating to the post of Chair from outgoing Trustees. The views expressed were taken into consideration before the current process began.

Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the current working practice, including the number of days worked and the location, of the Chairman of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation; and (ii) how an eight day per month contract reducing to four days per month will be of benefit to the work of the Foundation.
(AQW 20352/11-15)

Mr Ford: The post of Chairman is part-time as set out in the original terms of appointment. These state that the time commitment is dependent on the prevailing business needs of the Foundation. However it is acknowledged that Foundation business may entail approximately 2-3 days per month or as required.

As this is an unremunerated position my Department does not monitor the number of days worked over and above the minimum time commitment required, nor the location of where that work is carried out.

The anticipated time commitment of 8 days per month for the Chair takes account of the advancement and completion of the police museum, a significant undertaking for the Chair and fellow members of the Foundation's Board.

Foundation Trustees are fully engaged in the Foundation's business, a full-time project manager responsible for the day to day running of the police museum project is in place and dedicated administrative staff also provide valuable support.

This combined support is beneficial to the Foundation in the delivery of its functions and is an indication of the commitment that my Department is giving to maintaining and promoting the valuable work of the RUC GC Foundation.

Social Media

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any powers, or plans, to regulate the use of social media sites.
(AQW 20477/11-15)

Mr Ford: Regulation of the internet is not an issue which falls within the responsibilities of our devolved Executive. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 it is specifically recorded as a reserved matter. Decisions on regulation are for central Government to make through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Prisons: Body Scanners

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to his Department of the trial tests on scanning machines for prisons.
(AQW 20478/11-15)

Mr Ford: The costs to date of the pilots of millimetre wave technology are as follows:

Magilligan Prison	Hydebank Wood
£14232	£22019

The costs included in these prices are for installation of the equipment, leases, enabling works and staff training.

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Justice what is the limit on the number of meetings from which members of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships can be absent before they are no longer considered to be a member.
(AQO 3525/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no specified limit on the number of meetings from which PCSP members can be absent prior to removal specified either in legislation or in the Code of Practice for the exercise of functions by PCSPs.

The ability to deal with persistent non-attendance is provided for in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the legislation governing the operation of PCSPs. Within this Act it states that the Policing Board, or local Council, with the approval of the Board, can remove a political or independent member if they are satisfied that the member is unable or unfit to discharge their functions as a member of the PCSP. Such action would be taken only after careful consideration of all the evidence.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust: Grafton Recruitment

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Justice what role Grafton Recruitment played in the events organised by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust to promote rehiring opportunities for retired police officers in autumn 2008, October 2009 and March 2010.
(AQO 3523/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust organised information events on 25 September 2008 and 22 March 2010. Grafton Recruitment attended and presented at both these events which focussed on employment opportunities within the security sector. PRRT also held an Innovation and Business event on 14 October 2009 – Grafton Recruitment were not represented at this event. A number of recruitment organisations attended and presented at the events on these dates and were invited on the basis of their presence in the market place.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust: Grafton Recruitment

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Justice to confirm whether any members of the Board of Directors of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust have also been members of the PSNI's Internal Audit Committee during the lifetime of Grafton Recruitment's contract for the provision of agency, consultancy and associate staff.
(AQO 3522/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in response to AQO 3515 during Oral Question Time today, the PSNI's Director of Human Resources is a member of the PRRT's Board of Directors. The Director of Human Resources is also a member of the PSNI's Audit and Risk Committee, and has been a member since its inaugural meeting on 25 March 2004.

Bail Conditions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to explain whether it is lawful for a District Judge to apply a bail condition to a third party, not charged before the court, requiring the person to hand over any communication device they possess, and if this has happened what action the Department intends to take.
(AQW 20568/11-15)

Mr Ford: Bail decisions, including any conditions attached to them, are a matter for the independent judiciary acting within the law. There are well-established appeal and review mechanisms in relation to court decisions where the parties are not content. My Department has no role in relation to individual cases.

Prisons: Body Scanners

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Justice what contact the Prison Service had with the manufacturers regarding the scanner pilot at Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.
(AQO 3527/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is important to state that the objective of this process of technological evaluation was to establish whether a viable solution was available that would serve to reduce the level of intrusion inherent within our existing procedures.

From the start I was clear that any solution must, as a minimum, perform at least as well as our current processes and that the security and safety of all within our prisons was and remains paramount.

Following an evaluation of the Millimetre Wave Scanners at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood the Prison Service found that in the operational environment there were limitations to the technology as there was a reliance on the compliance of the prisoner

to be scanned and that our current full searching processes provided a higher level of security and therefore provided greater assurance.

It is important to remember that Millimetre Wave Body Scanners use technology that is primarily for the threat environment experienced by the aviation industry which is different to that present within our prisons and it is not in use in any prison in the United Kingdom. I remain very grateful to the manufacturers for their help and support throughout the pilot.

While I share the Prison Service's disappointment at the outcome of the pilot I am heartened by their determination to continue to seek a modern viable alternative to our existing practice of full searching.

To this end I have just received the Prison Service's Justification Application for seeking permission to pilot the use of transmission x-ray technology and after a short period of consideration I shall, as required by the legislation, register it with the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

Finally it is important to state that the requirement for full searching on entry to and exit from the Prison and in some other circumstances must remain until a satisfactory alternative can be found.

Minister of Justice: Meetings with the Home Secretary

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Justice how many times he has met with the Home Secretary since 1 January 2013.
(AQO 3528/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not met with Theresa May MP, the Home Secretary, since 1 January 2013. While I had planned to meet Mrs May at the Justice and Home Affairs Council Meeting in Dublin on 17-18 January, she was unable to attend this meeting. However, I did meet with Mark Harper MP, Minister of State for Immigration who attended in Mrs May's absence and I had a discussion with the Home Secretary via a phone call on 23 January 2013.

I have also met with James Brokenshire MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Security on two occasions since 1 January 2013.

Ethnic Minorities: Criminal Justice Inspection Report

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the last Criminal Justice Inspectorate report, especially those concerning ethnic minorities.
(AQO 3524/11-15)

Mr Ford: Criminal Justice Inspection published its follow-up inspection of the management of hate crime by the criminal justice system in 2010. Of the 19 recommendations from the review, 12 had been fully achieved, 3 partly achieved and 4 had not been achieved at the time of the review.

The recommendations that had not been achieved related to three broad areas: the development of an Intermediary Service, the effectiveness of management information systems in tracking hate crime cases through the system and the development of a specific hate crime strategy.

I published a revised Community Safety Strategy in July 2012, which sets out key commitments to tackling hate crime. Action plans have been agreed on all aspects of the Strategy, including on hate crime, and have been agreed by the Justice Committee. A multi-agency delivery group has been established to take forward the hate crime action plan. This provides the strategic context for addressing all forms of hate crime.

My Department will shortly pilot Registered Intermediary Schemes to assist vulnerable victims, witnesses and defendants with significant communication difficulties to provide evidence. This will be taken forward as part of the new five year victims and witnesses strategy.

In relation to the recommendations on monitoring hate crime cases through the justice system, work was undertaken on foot of the follow-up inspection, with changes made to the IT systems of a number of agencies.

Further work was identified as a result of these changes, and work is near completion to provide accurate, timely and comprehensive information on hate crime cases, from arrest to conviction. These statistics will be monitored regularly by the Hate Crime Delivery Group and will enable the effectiveness of the legislation to be kept under review.

Department for Regional Development

Road Schemes

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline, in order of priority, the planned major road schemes.
(AQW 20068/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Over this Budget period to 2015, investment in the Strategic Road Network is concentrated on the provision of dual carriageways on the A8 (Belfast – Larne), A2 (Shore Road, Greenisland) and A5 routes. Construction work commenced on the A8 in July 2012, and is anticipated to commence on the A2 in March 2013. Whilst preliminary works are being carried out on the A5, progression of the scheme is the subject of a legal challenge.

Beyond 2015, the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-21 includes for construction of a number of high priority schemes on the M2, A6 and A26, as part of a £390 million package funded through alternative finance in the period 2015/16 to 2020/21. However, a commitment to fund the revenue consequences of this roads package will be required, and so the timing will depend upon future resource budget settlements. In the event of alternative finance not being available, the scheme could be included, together with other priority schemes, in the bidding process for conventional capital funds, in the next Budget period.

Further schemes are contained within the Roads Service Preparation Pool and Forward Planning Schedule (http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/roadimprovements.htm), with those in the Preparation Pool generally attracting a higher priority. The availability of future funding will, however, influence the programming of these schemes.

Parkgate Quarry

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has been contacted by the Department of the Environment about assessing the suitability of surrounding roads before any decision is taken on the planning application for Parkgate Quarry.
(AQW 20087/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service, as a consultee through the planning process, has assessed the suitability of the haul routes and, having taken account of the improvements proposed by the applicant along this route, is satisfied the roads are capable of dealing with the traffic generated by the development.

Road Maintenance: Limavady and Coleraine Borough Council Areas

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent on road maintenance in Limavady and Coleraine Borough council areas, in each of the last two financial years.
(AQW 20104/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of expenditure incurred by my Department's Roads Service on road maintenance in the Limavady and Coleraine Borough Council areas, in each of the last two financial years, are set out in the table below:

Limavady Borough Council	**2010/11 (£K)**	**2011/12 (£K)**
Structural Maintenance	2,303	3,431
Routine Maintenance	558	618
Other Maintenance	629	408
Coleraine Borough Council	**2010/11 (£K)**	**2011/12 (£K)**
Structural Maintenance	2,373	3,617
Routine Maintenance	421	897
Other Maintenance	745	543

The term 'road maintenance' includes Structural, Routine and Other Maintenance activities, definitions of which are set out below.

- Structural Maintenance includes resurfacing, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage;
- Routine Maintenance includes grass cutting, weed control, verge maintenance and gully emptying etc; and
- Other Maintenance includes expenditure on highway structures, winter maintenance and traffic maintenance.

DRD: Legal Advice Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on legal advice in each of the last three financial years.
(AQW 20126/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The legal costs for my Department in each of the last three financial years are provided in the table below.

Year	**Legal Costs (£000's)**
2009/10	2,514
2010/11	2,757
2011/12	3,131

The figures provided exclude legal costs associated with the conveyance of land for road schemes which are capitalised into the total cost of the road scheme and therefore could only be determined at a disproportionate cost.

Blue Badge Scheme

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Regional Development how parking provision for blue badge holders on non-publicly owned property is monitored, and how he ensures that the provision meets all statutory requirements.
(AQW 20144/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has no responsibility for the regulation or enforcement of parking on non-publicly owned land. The provision and specification of parking facilities is normally a requirement of a planning consent, with DOE Planning the authority responsible for such matters.

DRD: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 20170/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The DRD Press Office employs five staff at a cost of £208,032.80 for the 2011/2012 financial year.

Snow Blower Vehicles

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development to which areas the newly purchased snow blower vehicles were deployed during the recent adverse winter weather.
(AQW 20175/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service last purchased snow blower vehicles in 2005. During the recent adverse winter weather, snow blowing vehicles were deployed in the following areas:

- The Mournes (C312 Slievenaman Road and B27 Moyad Road);
- Finnis, Banbridge (U4166 Dree Hill Road and U4211 Carrigagh Road);
- Larne (C70 Starbog Road, C66 Carnalbanagh Road, U4016 Mullaghsandel Road, U2121 Lough Road and U4014 Glenview Road);
- Ballymena (U2102 Douglas Road, U2102 Shilnavogy Road, U2168 Omerbane Road and U2169 Tullykittagh Road); and
- Feeney, Dungiven (U1188 Plantation Road, U1191 Barnes Road and U1181 Ballyrory Road).

From experience, Roads Service has found that snow blowers require at least 300mm depth of snow to operate efficiently.

Roads: Unadopted Roads and Housing Developments in Fermanagh District Council Area

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the unadopted roads and housing developments in the Fermanagh District Council area; (ii) the amount of bond remaining on each development; (iii) the estimated cost to bring each development up to the level required for adoption; (iv) the name of each relevant developer; (v) whether the developer in each case is still trading; and (vi) what works are required within each development to bring it up to the required standard for adoption.
(AQW 20182/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As of March 2013, there are 113 unadopted housing developments, in the Fermanagh District Council Area, for which my Department's Roads Service currently has road bonds in place. However, several developments are being delivered through phased construction under separate bonds. Therefore, the total number of bonds held is greater than 113.

Details of the developer and developments for which bonds are in place are shown in the table below:

Developer	Name of Site
McGillin Bros Ltd	Killygullen, Lisnaskea
John Boyle	Trory, Enniskillen "Heatherglen"
Ms R Gallagher Grove Heights	Grove Lodge, Ardvarney Road, Enniskillen Art 3[4]c
Rural Housing Association Ltd	The Knocks, Lisnaskea
P Clarke and Sons	Drumbrughas North, Lisnaskea
Leonard McGrath	Drumkeen, Ederney Art 3[4]c S 1-9.
McGurran Construction	Bellanaleck Enniskillen "The Beeches"
Rural Housing Association	Florence Court Demesne
George Ferguson Rathfort Crescent	Commons and Rathmore Belleek
Rural Housing Association Ltd	Tullyholvin Lower Boho
Belleek Properties	Rathmore Belleek

Developer	Name of Site
Derrylin Enterprises	Derrylin
M Claney	Belcoo, East Belcoo
Designer Homes Ltd	Crevenish Road Kesh (Rosscah View)
Rural housing Association	Brownhill Irvinestown
Fider Homes	Hazelwood, Dromore Road, Irvinestown
McGurran Construction	Laurelvale Court, Rossole Road, Rossorry, Enniskillen.S 1-16
Fernagh Construction	Drumgarrow, Enniskillen
Mr John Duffy	Tonnagh Road, Derrygonnelly s 1-7
Mr Paul Hanna	Killynure Wood, Tempo Road, Enniskillen
Rural Housing Association	Commons, Belleek
Creighton Construction	Meadow Farm, Shankill Garvary, Enniskillen.s.1-55
Creighton Construction	Drumclay, Enniskillen,
Fider Homes Ltd Briars Hill	Brownhill Road, Irvinestown Sprucehill
Leonard McGrath	Rossory Church Road, Enniskillen
Carncourt Properties	Rossory Church Road, Enniskillen
Brian Rodgers	Killyvilly, Enniskillen (Clover Brae)
Creighton Construcion	Chanterhill, Enniskillen (Ashdale)
Tracey Brothers	Old Rossorry Road, Ennisillen
Creighton Construction	Meadowvale, Tamlaght
Mr R Ferguson	Lower Chanterhill Road, Drumclay Enniskillen
DRS Development Ltd	Brookeborough Road, Gortacharn, Lisnaskea
Winterson Homes	Kilnakelly Road, Derrylin
Fyth Construction	Arney Road, Bellanaleck – The Commons
Rural Housing Association	Cashel (Scribbagh), Garrison
McCaffery Development	Lismonaghan Kinawley, Enniskillen
Oliver Ferguson	Gorteen Road Garrison, Meadowvale
Deane PW	Silverhill Manor, Silverhill, Enniskillen
John Gilmore	Killywegh Glebe, Monea, Enniskillen
J Lumman	20m SW of 13-15 Sligo Road, Enniskillen
Mr P McShea	Monea, Enniskillen
Liam Smyth	Edenmore, Tempo
Creighton Construction	Lackaboy Road, Chanterhill, Ashbourne Manor
G Rasdale	East of Rock College, The Commons, Belleek
Anala Development	East of Parkhill, Tatinderry, Maguiresbridge
T McGrath	Factory Road, Enniskillen
M & P Properties	Shankill road, Monea, Enniskillen (Killyveagh Glebe)
Dean PW	Old Rossorry Road, Ennisillen
H Graham	Crevenish Road, Roscolban
Fisher Engineering	Drumkeen, Ballinamallard
Cassidy	Tonagh, Derrygonnelly
T Chambers & Sons	Drumgoon, Maguiresbridge

Developer	Name of Site
C & J Developments	Laragh, Ballycassidy, Enniskillen
T Chambers and Sons	Farransasculloge, Killynamph, Castlebalfour, Lisnaskea
H Keenan	Cashel Crossroads, Scribbagh Garrison
DRS Developments	Cushwash, McKnagh, Lisnaskea
S McCrory	Corry, Belleek
Eugene Jones.	Kinoughtragh, Teemore Cross, Derrylin
Arney Developments	Arney, Bellanaleck, Enniskillen
GP Williams	Belfast Road, Enniskillen
S Carron	Drumkeen, Ederny
Euro Construction Corp. Ltd	Gorteen Road, Garrison
M Clarke	Tamlaght, Enniskillen
NIHE	Layby opposite 40-44 Kilmacormick Road
Ulidia Housing Ltd	Land at Top of Abbey Dr & Adj. To Springvale Enniskillen.
Newquay Developments	110 Irvinestown Road Enniskillen
Mr J Culmore	Glebleven Road, Tonagh, Derrygonnelly
Dawn Developments	14 Station Road, Kesh
Mr J Leonard	Knockaraven Garrison
Winterson Homes	Drumgoon Maguiresbridge
Joe Hendron	Ardess Glebe, Kesh (34c only adopted)
Thompson Developments	Lisnagole Road, Lisnaskea
Leonard McGrath	Crevenish Road, Kesh
Clara Contracts	Main street, Derrylin
IS Projects	Doon Road, Derrygurdry, Derrylin
Rathbranagh (Croxford) Properties	Main Street, Derrylin
Thompson Developments Ltd	Brookeborough Road, Gortacharn, Lisnaskea
Anchorage Developments (Darren Chapman)	Aghagay, Newtownbutler
Tom Foster	Circular Road/Brook Street junction, Lisbellaw
Asda, Enniskillen	Derrychara Link/Erneside, Enniskillen
The Family Trust c/o John O'Brien	Coolacrim Derrylister, Enniskillen
Carrollmac Homes ltd	South of Drubrghas Road/Maguiresbridge Road Lisnaskea
O'Kane and Device	At Drumgarrow Adj to Aughaward Road, Enniskillen
Governors of Enniskillen PS	Enniskillen Integrated Primary School, Derrygore Rd
Tracy Brothers	SE of 37 Sligo Road, Enniskillen
DRS	Roseville House, Killygullen, Lisnaskea
Anchorage Developments	Lismalore and Aghalun, Brookborough
Tracey Brothers	30-32 Old Rossory Road, Enniskillen
McLoughlin Developments	Whiteisland Road, Belleek
Turkington Holdings Ltd	Tesco, Derrychara Road, Enniskillen
NIHE Article 9	HillviewRoad, Enniskillen
GP Williams	Tullynargan & Ardlough, Irvinestown Road

Developer	Name of Site
Bercham	Belleek
Bonner properties	Lands at Drumary 120m NW of St Pats Derrygonnelly
Mayne developments ltd	Land N&NE Mill Green, N&NW Fairview Park, Derrygonnelly
Oaklee housing association ltd	Old Tempo Road, Agharainy, Enniskillen
McGurran Construction	Scaffog, Derrylin Road, Enniskillen
GP Williams Ltd	Killyreagh, Tamlaght, Enniskillen
O'Kane & Devine Ltd	Arney Road, Bellanaleck
Fivemiletown CDA	Junction Tempo Road/Clabby Road, Clabby
Maine Developments	Garrison
Mayne Developments ltd	Castlederg Road, Cahore, Ederney,
Clara Contracts Ltd	East JCT Edencaw Road/Market Street, Drumkeen, Ederney
Careve Ltd	Killynure, Tempo Road, Enniskillen
Thomson Developments	Station Road, Brookborough
Keel Properties	Adj to Scottsborough House, Magheraveely
Brackenvale Developments Ltd	Adj to Birchgrove, Teemore
LP Smyth	Kilmacbrack Road, Donagh, Lisnaskea
Sean Devine Group	Teemore, Derrylin (TAS approval)
GP Williams Ltd	Ardvarney Road, Ederney
APEX Housing Association Ltd	Main Street, Lisbellaw
Rural Housing Association	West of Adrian Heights, Donagh, Lisnaskea
Clanmill Housing Association Ltd	Ballaghmore Backlands, Coleshill Road, Enniskillen

Detailed information relating to individual bonds is deemed commercially sensitive. However, I can confirm the total value of bonds currently held against private developments in Fermanagh is £9 million.

The estimated cost of outstanding works on each development and details of the work required is not available. This level of detail is only collated when an Article 11 Notice is to be served on the developer providing notice that my Department intends to complete the work and draw on the bond surety.

Whilst Roads Service has some local knowledge relating to the likely trading status of individual developers, my Department must rely upon the receipt of a deed of appointment from a receiver to definitively establish that a developer is no longer trading.

DRD: Staff Travel Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department of staff travel claims in each of the last three years.
(AQW 20193/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The cost to the Department for Regional Development of staff travel claims in each of the last three years is detailed as follows:

Year	Spend (£000's)
2009/10	2,354
2010/11	2,219
2011/12	2,172

Of the £6.75m spent during the three year period 97% (£6.55m) relates to vehicle mileage claims.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures have been put in place, and what forward planning is being conducted, to prevent the spread of Ash Dieback when cutting roadside hedgerows.
(AQW 20205/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As most roadside trees and hedges are on lands adjacent to public roads, it is the responsibility of property owners, or occupiers of those lands, to ensure that trees and hedges do not endanger or obstruct road users. Roads Service periodically places notices in the local press and farming journals reminding owners and occupiers of their responsibilities.

Roads Service does not usually cut hedges, unless it is absolutely essential for road safety purposes.

However, I have confirmed with my Ministerial colleague at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Michelle O'Neill, that farmers in receipt of payments under Single Farm Payment and other land based schemes, such as LFA and Agri-environment schemes, must adhere to Cross-compliance and the requirements of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). One of these requirements prohibits cutting of hedges during the period 1 March to 31 August.

Minister O'Neill also informs me that scientific evidence indicates that cutting ash plants and trees during the June to October period may increase the risk of Chalara infection. DARD advises all farmers and landowners to refrain from cutting hedges and ash trees during this period, when the risk of infection is highest, and delay the commencement of cutting, until November at the earliest, where possible.

Officials from the Plant Health and Horticulture Inspectorate within the Agri-food Inspection Branch of DARD has advised officials within Roads Service's Engineering Policy Branch of the mechanism for reporting Ash Die-back disease symptoms to DARD and of biosecurity requirements. Details of these procedures will be included within a Director of Engineering Memorandum (DEM) that will issue or be brought to the attention of relevant staff within Roads Service.

Reservoirs

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any planned repair work to reservoirs.
(AQW 20227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it plans to carry out repair work on education tower valves and pipe work at the following impounding reservoirs which will ensure that their safety is not compromised - Dorisland, Copeland, Lough Mourne, Lower South Woodburn, Middle South Woodburn, Upper South Woodburn, North Woodburn, Church Road, Portavoe, Lower Ballysallagh, Upper Ballysallagh, Lower Conlig, Upper Conlig, Killea, Knockbracken, Boomers and Fofanny. It is anticipated that this work will commence in April 2013 and be completed by December 2014.

In addition, NIW undertakes periodic inspections at its impounding reservoirs and carries out minor maintenance on an on-going basis.

Railways: Fuel Efficiency

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development whether fuel efficiency on Northern Ireland Railway's Class 3k and 4k sets is best maintained by leaving engines running for long periods when trains have reached their destinations before making the return trip.
(AQW 20328/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that all NI Railways trains (Class 3000 and Class 4000) are equipped with auto shut-down/stable mode which shuts all but one engine down after circa 20 minutes. One auxiliary engine remains running to preserve basic on-train heating, lighting and system supports. This is considered the most cost effective engine management system.

Cycle Lane: A2 Bangor to Belfast Road

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any assessment has been made of the possibility of a cycle lane on the A2 Bangor to Belfast road between Ballyrobert and Holywood.
(AQW 20394/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service's proposals for transport in the Belfast Metropolitan Area are presented within the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP). The Plan aims to provide for and encourage a greater use of public transport, walking and cycling. Roads Service's primary focus is to therefore develop the cycling network, as envisaged within the Plan.

Whist I can see the benefit and merit in providing the cycle facilities you have suggested, unfortunately, this route has not been identified within the BMTP. However, officials have added this proposal to their list of areas for future consideration.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the value of depreciation of Northern Ireland Water's assets for each of the last three years; and (ii) the consequential cost to his Department.
(AQW 20397/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below shows (i) the value of depreciation of Northern Ireland Water's assets for each of the last three years, and (ii) the consequential cost to my Department for the same period.

	2009-10 £m	2010-11 £m	2011-12 £m
Depreciation – Northern Ireland Water's statutory accounts	62.1	47.8	55.6
Depreciation – public expenditure implications for DRD	61.5	42.7	50.3

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much funding does his Department provide to subsidise Northern Ireland Water.
(AQW 20432/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In 2012/13 the subsidy paid to NIW by DRD on behalf of customers will be £282 million. This means that consumers do not have to pay directly for water and sewerage services in line with the Executive's Programme for Government commitment not to introduce domestic charges.

Department for Social Development

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: House Security

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what action the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is taking to enhance security of their houses in areas of high criminality; and how many housing units have been fitted with (i) strengthened doors; (ii) low level door locks; and (iii) reinforced windows, in each of the last four years.
(AQW 19793/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive does not make any difference from a specification view point for areas of high criminality. They advise that all new Door-Sets, inclusive of door and frame, which are installed in their properties through planned maintenance programmes are to a standard which includes the Police "Secured by Design" licence. Doors meeting this specification have been replaced on a condition basis over the last four years within External Cyclical Maintenance schemes and Kitchen Replacement schemes. However the actual number of doors replaced within these schemes has not been separately recorded and is not available. From 2012 to 2015, the Housing Executive will have installed 18,000 "Secured by Design" fire doors to their flats and maisonette stock as part of their fire door replacement programme.

In relation to ii) and iii) the Housing Executive maintenance records cannot supply the detail on locks or windows.

The Housing Executive liaises with PSNI and other agencies when specific issues are brought to light and where applicable have amended specifications to help address specific problems.

Drumtara, Ballee, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development what action has been taken to fulfil the pledge by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to provide Drumtara in Ballee, Ballymena with a community house.
(AQW 19878/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that approval was granted by their Chief Executive's Business Committee on 26 November 2012 to award community letting at 168-171 Drumtara, Ballee, Ballymena, to Seven Towers Cultural Community and Educational Association (STCCEA).

As the four flats had been vacant for some time and in a poor state of repair, approval was granted for 'change to tenancy repairs' to bring the properties back from void status. A schedule of the necessary work has been prepared and it is estimated that these works could cost in the region of £76,000. Before work can commence, this expenditure needs the approval of the Housing Executive's Chief Executive's Business Committee and it is hoped this will be considered at their meeting in March 2013.

Drumtara, Ballee, Ballymena

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals the local community has put forward for the vacant site formerly 60-69 Drumtara, Ballee, Ballymena; and what position the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has taken on these proposals.
(AQW 19879/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that the Seven Towers Cultural Community and Educational Association (STCCEA) requested the use of 60-69 Drumtara, Ballee, Ballymena, as an allotment project in March 2012. The site in question was former Housing Executive dwellings which had been demolished and the Housing Executive had obtained planning approval for replacement dwellings on it.

The STCCEA looked at alternative sites but none were feasible and they asked for their original request to be reconsidered. This is currently being progressed through the Housing Executive's approval system. They estimate that if approval is granted - under their Housing Executive's Growing Spaces Project - the allotment could be operational in a few months.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the number of boiler replacement scheme applications that have been (i) registered; (ii) processed; and (iii) successful since the launch of the new scheme in 2012, broken down by constituency area.
(AQW 19897/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

Council Area	Application Forms Issued	Approvals Authorised	Notification of completion of Works Received
Antrim	618	141	54
Ards	574	100	20
Armagh	1,373	235	49
Ballymena	1,096	282	133
Ballymoney	464	106	38
Banbridge	825	151	28
Belfast	2,436	667	261
Carrickfergus	296	43	16
Castlereagh	595	112	32
Coleraine	858	173	69
Cookstown	826	146	35
Craigavon	1,410	231	55
Derry	1,799	329	63
Down	663	100	21
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1,183	233	40
Fermanagh	951	164	17
Larne	443	91	30
Limavady	701	92	22
Lisburn	985	195	58
Magherafelt	900	175	30
Moyle	238	62	17
Newry & Mourne	2,408	495	90
Newtownabbey	839	171	63
North Down	550	104	30
Omagh	1,052	232	48

Council Area	Application Forms Issued	Approvals Authorised	Notification of completion of Works Received
Strabane	577	78	15
Total	**24,660**	**4,908**	**1,334**

The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency area and the attached table details the number of boiler replacements by District Council area. The totals for Northern Ireland are:

- 24,660 applications forms issued;
- 9,992 completed applications forms have been received;
- 4.908 approvals issued;
- 1,348 boiler replacements completed.

Boiler Replacement by District Council Area

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Public Car Parks: Events

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current policy on use of public car parks for staging events.
(AQW 19933/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not have a policy on the use of public car parks for staging events. In circumstances where my Department owns a car park, it is managed by the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service on my Department's behalf.

Housing: Derelict Houses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment he has made of (i) the number of homes remaining derelict at Ballysally, Coleraine; and (ii) the ability of a Housing Association to bring these properties into use during the 2013/2014 financial year.
(AQW 20017/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently a total of 19 vacant properties in the Ballysally estate in Coleraine which are owned by SHAC Housing Association. Oaklee Housing Association, in conjunction with SHAC, currently has plans to refurbish 10 houses (4 of which are vacant) in the first half of 2013/14.

I am however committed to ensuring that all of these vacant properties are refurbished as a matter of priority. I have therefore instructed my officials to meet with Oaklee Housing Association to instruct them that all these vacant properties should be refurbished as a matter of priority.

Housing Rights Service

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has allocated to the Housing Rights Service in each of the last five years.
(AQW 20071/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the amount of funding which has been allocated to the Housing Rights Service in each of the last five years.

	Year				
	2008/09	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**2012/13**
DSD Funding	760,878	782,852	822,878	841,936	895,500

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Rights Service

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many cases the Housing Rights Service has dealt with in each of the last five years; and why the people involved contacted the Service.
(AQW 20072/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below shows the number of clients which Housing Rights Service has dealt with since 2008.

	Year				
	2008/2009	**2009/2010**	**2010/2011**	**2011/2012**	**2012/2013**
Number of cases handled	4831	5158	6426	8262	4966*

*Figures are at 31/12/12

Housing Rights Service receives funding from the Department to provide advice to clients in respect of finding accommodation, housing debt, renting privately, repairs and homelessness. From 2009 this has included mortgage debt advice.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Mortgage Repayments

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department will take to assist people who are struggling with mortgage repayments; and when the action will be taken.
(AQW 20083/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department funds a Mortgage Debt Advice Service to help those experiencing difficulty making mortgage payments avoid the distressing prospect of court action and possible repossession. This free advice service, operated by the Housing Rights Service, has received funding until March 2015. The service operates during office working hours and now includes an online advisor and evening opening hours to 8.00pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays and can be contacted directly on 0300 323 0310.

My Department also provides help through Support for Mortgage Interest to people receiving certain social security benefits.

Housing Executive: Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 3363/11-15, for a breakdown of the £5.5m savings.
(AQW 20183/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to a breakdown of the £5.5m savings, this information is not currently available as the Housing Executive's tender price assumptions are commercial and confidential and cannot be shared with third parties as this may adversely affect the tender process.

Housing Executive

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether Housing Executive tenants will retain their statutory right to choose whether their estate is transferred to another social landlord, such as a housing association, when the Housing Executive undergoes its proposed reform.
(AQW 20225/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I want to stress from the outset that I view this as the start of a process of discussion and deliberation during which my Department will engage and consult widely with key stakeholders to develop the detail behind these high level proposals and to ensure there is consensus and agreement. I can confirm that, in accordance with Article 88C of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, as inserted by Article 92 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 and amended by Article 128 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, Housing Executive tenants will be consulted on any proposed transfers of housing stock to other landlords.

My aim in reforming housing delivery structures is to provide a sustainable model for housing that ensures we can continue to deliver well maintained housing stock for tenants, improve the focus on strategy and ensure value for money for taxpayers.

Welfare Reform Bill: Underoccupancy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how much revenue is expected to be raised by the proposed underoccupancy rate in the Welfare Reform Bill.
(AQW 20274/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The introduction of the size criteria for new and existing working-age claimants living in the social rented sector will replicate that which already exists for Housing Benefit claimants living in the private rented sector thereby bringing the two sectors more into line with each other.

The measure is designed to contain Housing Benefit expenditure which has seen a dramatic rise from £312m in 2003/04 to £455m in 2009/10, rather than raise revenue.

Initial estimates, based on rent levels for 2012/13, show savings of approximately £13.9m in relation to Housing Executive tenancies, and a further £6m from Housing Association tenancies.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what communication his Department has had with the Department of Work and Pensions regarding the bedroom tax, given that Iain Duncan Smith has instructed his officials to look again at how the bedroom tax will impact on disabled people.
(AQW 20276/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have had a number of very productive meetings with Lord Freud in relation to all aspects of Welfare Reform and more recently, specifically in relation to the underoccupation restriction.

I can confirm there is no change to the current policy situation and the introduction of the underoccupation restriction will proceed as planned, in Great Britain, in April 2013.

The Department for Work and Pensions is commissioning an independent evaluation of the underoccupation deduction. An initial draft will be available in 2014 and a final draft in 2015.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the target time for a Housing Executive property to be made fit for purpose for a new tenant once the previous tenant has moved out.
(AQW 20281/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that the turnaround or target time for re-letting a property that becomes vacant is based upon the cost of the Changes of Tenancy works. The relevant timescales in relation to the turnaround times are as follows: -

Value of works required to complete Change of Tenancy	**Turnaround time (days)**
£0.00 - £500	5 working days
£500 - £2,000	10 working days
£2,000 - £5,000	20 working days
£5,000 - £8,750	30 working days
£8,750 - £50,000	40 working days
£50,000 +	60 working days

The Housing Executive has advised that in the main the value of work needed at change of tenancy falls below the £2,000 level and is therefore completed within 10 working days.

Hostels: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down live in hostels.
(AQW 20285/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the table below details the number of households placed in temporary accommodation by the Housing Executive in response to their homelessness duties in their Bangor District Office area at 12 February 2013.

Household type	**NIHE Hostel**	**Voluntary Sector Hostel**	**Total**
Singles	2	8	10
Families	4	2	6
Total	**6**	**10**	**16**

It is important to note that there are placements in other self referral hostels in Bangor of which the Housing Executive would not be aware.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Welfare Reform: Definition of Bedroom

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to provide details on the dimensions and specifics of what constitutes a bedroom that will be subject to the bedroom tax.
(AQW 20395/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no statutory definition of what constitutes a bedroom in social security legislation as dimensions and questions of suitability of a room for use as a bedroom are irrelevant for Housing Benefit purposes. This is due to the fact that tenancy agreements and rent levels generally reflect the number of bedrooms in the property and may take into account their size. It is in the tenant's best interest to decide at the point of accepting the tenancy whether the accommodation is of a suitable size for their needs.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development whether foster carers with a spare room will be subject to the underoccupancy penalty; and whether he will consider proposing an exemption for foster carers to the underoccupancy rule. **(AQW 20460/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: It may be helpful if I explain that the introduction of the size criteria for working age claimants underoccupying in the social rented sector will bring this sector into line with the approach already in place in the private rented sector, where the rate of Housing Benefit is related to the size of dwelling the claimant needs.

As with claims in the private rented sector, a room for a foster child will not be included when calculating how many bedrooms a family unit requires. Therefore, a household that has an extra room for a current or potential foster child will be treated as under-occupying and there are no plans to introduce a specific exemption for this particular group.

Rather than creating blanket exemptions for broad categories, support will be made available in Northern Ireland by way of Discretionary Housing Payments. This is a more appropriate way of dealing with vulnerable claimants as these Payments offer flexibility based on local decisions helping to ensure that scarce resources can be targeted as needed. So as not to discourage foster carers, and in recognition that there may be cases where it would make sense to provide additional support, Discretionary Housing Payments could help to meet housing costs between placements.

The Discretionary Housing Payments budget in Northern Ireland has been increased substantially and this increase includes additional funding of £1.005m in each of the years from 2013/14 to 2016/17, specifically targeted at people who live in significantly adapted accommodation (due to someone in the household having a disability) and foster carers (including those between placements) who find themselves with a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to under-occupation.

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

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

In Bound Volume 68, page WA 13, please replace AQW 3351/11-15 with:

Area VII under the Western Waters

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Area VII under the Western Waters scallops effort regime is closed; and when it is due to re-open.
(AQW 3351/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): In agreeing the policy decisions contained in the 18 July announcement, we gave a strong mandate for action across a range of significant strategic issues.

We are pleased to be able to inform you that this mandate has been built upon with continuing strong progress on these important issues.

The Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation Board was established on 10 September 2012 and will take forward the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh site.

Kathryn Stone OBE was appointed to the post of Victim's Commissioner on 24 September 2012.

A competition to appoint a new CEO of ILEX was recently advertised, and applications closed on Friday, 8 February.

The Investment Strategy 2011-2021 was agreed at the Executive meeting held on 3 September 2012 and was published on 8 October 2012.

Work is ongoing on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and a Strategy will be published on completion of discussions between parties.

The Education Bill was introduced on 2 October and completed Second Stage on 15 October. The Bill is currently in Committee Stage, which is scheduled for completion on 8 April.

Legislation on welfare reform, incorporating important protections secured for vulnerable people here, is being progressed in the Assembly.

Social Investment Fund steering groups comprising voluntary/community and political representatives were established in October 2012 in each social investment zone. We have received draft strategic area plans for all areas. Finalised strategic area plans should be ready by 28 February 2013.

Work on changes to post-2015 structures of Government is being taken forward by the Executive Party Leaders Group. The Reports of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee will contribute to this work.

Department of Education

In this Bound Volume, page WA 143, please replace AQW 19994/11-15 with:

Schools: Capital Build Projects

Mr Storey asked Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 19188/11-15, what approval stage has been achieved by each project.
(AQW 19994/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Progress as at 19 February 2013 on the 18 capital build projects announced in June 2012 is shown in the table below:

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Victoria Park Primary School	Mid May 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Design work continuing. ■ Waiting for final EA to be submitted to Department.

School	Estimated Construction Start	Current Status
Eglinton Primary School	June 2014	■ Stage C approval. ■ Design work continuing. ■ EA has been submitted to the Department and currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Foyle College / Ebrington Primary School	Autumn 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Design work continuing. ■ Waiting for Stage D approval to finalise EA.
Enniskillen Model	August 2014	■ Stage C and costs due July 2013. ■ EA has been submitted to the Department and currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Dromore Central	Sept 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Design work continuing. ■ Waiting for final EA to be submitted to Department.
St Clares Primary School Newry & St Colman's Abbey Primary School Newry	September 2013	■ Stage D approval. ■ PQQ templates with Project Manager. ■ PQQ expected March 2013. ■ Department waiting for additional information to finalise EA.
St Mary's Primary School Banbridge	August 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Revised Stage D requested by DE. ■ EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Tannaghmore Primary School Lurgan	June 2013	■ Stage D approval. ■ EA has been submitted to Finance Director for submission to DFP.
St Teresa's Primary School Lurgan	May 2013	■ Stage D approval. ■ EA is currently with Departmental ■ Professional Advisors for review.
Colaiste Feirste	November 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Revised stage D requested by DE. ■ Awaiting approval of Stage D before EA can be finalised.
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	August 2013	■ Stage C approval. ■ Design work continuing. ■ EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Belmont House Special School -Derry	June 2014	■ Consultants to be appointed. ■ Economic Appraisal awaited.
Rossmar Special School Limavady	May 2014	■ Consultants to be appointed. ■ Economic Appraisal awaited.
Castletower Ballymena	2015	■ Consultants to be appointed. ■ Department waiting for final EA to be submitted.
St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry	September 2013	■ Stage D approval ■ PQQ Complete ■ EA is currently with Departmental Professional Advisors for review.
Arvalee Special School, Omagh	TBC	■ Appointment of Consultants to undertake Design and EA approved.
St Gerard's Resource Centre, Belfast	June 2013	■ Options Analysis on future use of old Balmoral High School awaiting approval with Departmental Professional Advisers.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

In this Bound Volume, page WA 256, please replace AQW 19883/11-15 with:

Shale Oil

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration has been given to the awarding of licences for the extraction of shale oil.
(AQW 19883/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Under the terms of the Petroleum (Production) Act (Northern Ireland) 1964 my Department grants licences to search and bore for and get petroleum in Northern Ireland. The petroleum legislation makes no distinction between the different types of petroleum (oil or gas) or the geological formations (e.g. shale or sandstone) in which the petroleum may be found.

The extraction of oil or gas is subject to my Department's approval of a development plan submitted by the Licensee. Such a plan would only follow an extensive programme of exploration and appraisal and it would also be subject to a number of other consents including planning permission.

No such plans have been submitted to my Department in respect of shale oil extraction.

Department of the Environment

In Bound Volume 81, page WA 228, please replace AQW 18266/11-15 with:

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: New Housing Units

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of new housing units planned under the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan, broken down by council area.
(AQW 18266/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The adopted version of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) will set out the Department's conclusions on the number of new houses required for each council area. I am currently working closely with officials to finalise the plan policies and proposals. The Department is currently assessing the recommendations contained within the Planning Appeals Commission's (PAC) reports which were produced following the Public Inquiry.

It would be inappropriate to release the figures you requested ahead of the publication of the adopted plan, but I did publish the PAC report on BMAP in 2012 as I believed it was necessary and reasonable for people to see its recommendations.

In Bound Volume 76, page WA 401, please replace AQW 12900/11-15 with:

Planning Application A/2008/0408/F

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether his Department carried out a revised Environmental Impact Assessment determination, for planning application A/2008/0408/F, after it accepted an amendment to the application which introduced new settlement lagoons that did not feature in the original proposals; and (ii) if not, to outline the reasons why.
(AQW 12900/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): A revised Environmental Impact Assessment determination was carried but it concluded that an Environmental Impact Statement was not required as the nature and extent of the amended development proposal was judged not to give rise to significant environmental effects.

I have asked for a full submission on this matter to consider the issue further.

Department of Justice

In Bound Volume 80, page WA 305, please replace AQW 17638/11-15 with:

Criminal Justice Inspection: Departmental Bodies

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to outline the type of internal departmental bodies that must be formally notified to the Criminal Justice Inspectorate.
(AQW 17638/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
- The Youth Justice Agency for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service
- The Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Forensic Science Northern Ireland
- The Police Ombudsman's Office for Northern Ireland
- The State Pathologist's Department for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
- The Parole Commissioners
- The Legal Services Commission
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
- The Compensation Agency
- The Heath and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division
- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

In Bound Volume 80, page WA 305, please replace AQW 17639/11-15 with:

Criminal Justice Inspection: Departmental Bodies

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the remit the Criminal Justice Inspectorate has in the inspection or monitoring of internal departmental bodies in other Departments.
(AQW 17639/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
- The Youth Justice Agency for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service
- The Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Forensic Science Northern Ireland
- The Police Ombudsman's Office for Northern Ireland
- The State Pathologist's Department for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
- The Parole Commissioners
- The Legal Services Commission
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
- The Compensation Agency
- The Heath and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division
- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

In Bound Volume 80, page WA 306, please replace AQW 17659/11-15 with:

Criminal Justice Inspection: Organisations Inspected

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the organisations that are inspected by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate. **(AQW 17659/11-15)**

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
- The Youth Justice Agency for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service
- The Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Forensic Science Northern Ireland
- The Police Ombudsman's Office for Northern Ireland
- The State Pathologist's Department for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
- The Parole Commissioners
- The Legal Services Commission
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
- The Compensation Agency
- The Heath and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division
- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

Department for Social Development

In this Bound Volume, page WA 329, please replace AQW 19885/11-15 with:

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development (i) the number of queries to the Boiler Replacement Scheme since the scheme was launched; (ii) the number of jobs completed; (iii) the target number of jobs which would have been expected to be completed at this stage; and (iv) for a breakdown of the types of replacement, such as oil to oil, oil to gas, or oil to renewable. **(AQW 19885/11-15)**

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Since the Boiler Replacement Scheme was launched in September 2012:

- 28,223 queries have been received;
- 9,992 completed applications forms have been received;
- 4,908 approvals have been issued;
- 1,348 boiler replacements have been completed;
- 1,051 oil to oil replacements have been completed;
- 297 conversions to gas have been completed.

The number of boiler completions at any time depends on the response times of the applicants. Over the Christmas period and in to January 2013 it is to be expected that there will less installations. From February 2013 onwards it is reasonable to expect that the number of installations will increase as at present. The number of completions to date is consistent with a reasonable response time from applicants coupled with the time of year.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 11 February 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 The death of Police Officer Philippa Reynolds in Londonderry

Mr Gregory Campbell, made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the death of police officer Philippa Reynolds in Londonderry. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Sydney Anderson replace Mr Sammy Douglas as a member of the Committee for Social Development; and that Mr Sammy Douglas replace Mr Sydney Anderson as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning and as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - Review of Policy on Apprenticeships and Youth Training

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding the Review of Policy on Apprenticeships and Youth Training, following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Motion - Suspend Standing Orders

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 11 February 2013.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

4.3 Motion - Supply Resolution for the 2012-2013 Spring Supplementary Estimates

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves that a total sum, not exceeding £15,459,758,000 be granted out of the Consolidated Fund for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 and that total resources, not exceeding £16,572,965,000 be authorised for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly

Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2013 as summarised for each Department or other public body in Columns 3(c) and 2(c) of Table 1 in the volume of the Northern Ireland Spring Supplementary Estimates 2012-13 that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued on this motion and the motion on the Supply Resolution for the 2013-14 Vote on Account.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) 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 First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, 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 Motion - Supply Resolution for the 2012-2013 Spring Supplementary Estimates (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on both motions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

6.2 Motion - Supply Resolution for the 2013-2014 Vote on Account

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves that a sum, not exceeding £7,136,563,000, be granted out of the Consolidated Fund on account for or towards defraying the charges for Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 and that resources, not exceeding £7,641,877,000, be authorised, on account, for use by Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints, the Food Standards Agency, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2014 as summarised for each Department or other public body in Columns 4 and 6 of Table 1 in the Vote on Account 2013-14 document that was laid before the Assembly on 4 February 2013.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

6.3 First Stage - Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, introduced a Bill to authorise the issue out of the Consolidated Fund of certain sums for the service of the years ending 31st March 2013 and 2014; to appropriate those sums for specified purposes; to authorise the Department of Finance and Personnel to borrow on the credit of the appropriated sums; to authorise the use for the public service of certain resources for the years ending 31st March 2013 and 2014; and to revise the limits on the use of certain accruing resources in the year ending 31st March 2013.

The Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

6.4 Final Stage - Business Improvements Districts Bill (NIA 9/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved that the Final Stage of the Business Improvements Districts Bill (NIA 9/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Business Improvements Districts Bill (NIA 9/11-15) passed Final Stage without division.

6.5 Legislative Consent Motion - Part 1 of the Energy Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the provisions in Part 1 of the Energy Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 29 November 2012, dealing with Electricity Market Reform.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.39pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

11 February 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 06 - 11 February 2013

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

CITB - ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland Annual Report 2011-2012 (DEL)

The Use of Early Guilty Pleas in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (DOJ)

Department for Regional Development: Review of an Investigation of a Whistleblower Complaint (NIAO)

5. Assembly Reports

Consideration of the Legislative Consent Memorandum Concerning Provisions in Part 1 of the Westminster Energy Bill Dealing with Electricity Market Reforms (NIA 89/11-15) (Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment)

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

S. R. 2013/22 Mental Health (Private Hospitals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DHSSPS)

S. R. 2013/27 The Limestone Road Area, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/20 The Waiting Restrictions (Bangor) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/21 The Waiting Restrictions (Londonderry) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD)

S. R. 2013/23 The Employment Rights (Increase of Limits) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Financial Statements 2011-2012 (OFMDFM)

11. Westminster Publications

Statute Law (Repeals) Act 2013 Chapter 2

Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 Chapter 3

European Union (Croatian Accession and Irish Protocol) Act 2013 Chapter 5

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Chapter 6

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 12 February 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Door to Door Transport

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, made a statement regarding Door to Door Transport, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - Future of the Education Maintenance Allowance

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding the Future of the Education Maintenance Allowance, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Consideration Stage - Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Consideration Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 to 3 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

Bill NIA 16/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker.

2.4 Second Stage - Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Second Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.27pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

3.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Second Stage - Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15) passed Second Stage with cross-community support *nemine contradicente.*

5. Adjournment

Mr Danny Kinahan spoke to his topic regarding Consultation on care homes in residential areas in South Antrim.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.06pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

12 February 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 12 February 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Budget Bill (as introduced) (NIA 18/11-15)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Equality Commission for NI Draft Code of Practice on Equal Pay (OFMDFM)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/29 Disease Control (Standstill) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Public Right of Pedestrian Access to DARD Forestry Land and New Forestry Land Byelaws (DARD)

8. Consultation Documents

Annual Report and Financial Statements for Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd 2008 (DE)

Annual Report and Financial Statements for Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd 2010 (DE)

Annual Report and Financial Statements for Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd 2011 (DE)

Annual Report and Financial Statements for Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd 2012 (DE)

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 12 February 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12				
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	22.01.13	19.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13			
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	05.03.13					
Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A				

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 18 February 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Incident Regarding the Discovery of Equine DNA in Beef Products

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the Discovery of Equine DNA in Beef Products, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair

2.2 Consideration Stage - Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 to 7 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedules 1 to 4 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

Budget Bill 18/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker.

2.3 Motion - The draft Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Justice

Debate ensued.

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.4 Motion - Draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Planning Bill (NIA Bill 17/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 7 June 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Planning Bill (NIA Bill 17/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for the Environment

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion - Health Inequalities

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety's review of health inequalities; notes the recommendations relating to the restructuring of government Departments; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the recommendations in the report with the Ministerial Group on Public Health and to action those that are within his remit.

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

4. Question Time

4.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

5. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Health Inequalities (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5.2 Motion - Supporting Growth in the Sustainable Energy Sector

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Executive to encourage and support further growth in the sustainable energy sector to help maximise Government's contribution to creating sustainable, high value jobs in the renewable energy sector, developing the green economy, enhancing security of supply and encouraging consumers to use renewable energy.

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.01pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker
18 February 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 13 - 18 February 2013

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 Central Investment Fund for Charities Annual Report to 30 September 2012 (DSD).

Funds in Court in Northern Ireland Statement of Accounts 2010-2011 (DOJ).

South West College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL).

Insolvency Service Annual Report and Account for year ended 31 March 2012 (DETI).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Antarctic Bill Legislative Consent Motion NIA 95/11-15 (Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).

Report on the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA 97/11-15 (Committee for Finance and Personnel).

Report on the Welfare Reform Bill NIA 13/11-15 (Committee for Social Development).

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

S. R. 2013/24 The Gas (Applications for Licences and Extensions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DETI).

S. R. 2013/25 The Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Maternity and Parental Leave) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL).

S. R. 2013/26 The Parental Leave (EU Directive) (Flexible Working) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL).

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/28 The Urban Clearways (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DRD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Proposals to suspend commercial eel fishing in Europe (DCAL).

8. Consultation Documents

Energy Consultation Offshore Renewable Energy Bill (DETI).

Consultation on the Draft Controlled Waste and Duty of Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DE).

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 19 February 2013

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 Further Consideration Stage - Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15)

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford , moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Budget Bill, on behalf of the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Budget Bill 18/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.2 Consideration Stage - Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15)

A valid Petition of Concern was presented under Standing Order 28 on Tuesday 19 February 2013, in relation to Amendments 21, 24 and 26, proposed to the Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) (Appendix 1).

The Minister of Justice moved the Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill.

41 amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 1 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 1 inserting a new clause after clause 1, was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 2 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 4 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 10 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 11 to Clause 3 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 3 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 12 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 5 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 13 inserting a new clause after clause 6, was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 7 stand part of the Bill.

The sitting was suspended at 12.28pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

3.2 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Consideration Stage - Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair

After debate, Amendment 14 inserting a new clause after clause 7, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 15 inserting a new clause after clause 7, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 16 inserting a new clause after clause 7, was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 17 to Clause 9 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 9 as amended stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 10 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 1 stand part of the Bill.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair

After debate, Amendment 18 to Schedule 2 was **negatived** on division.

As Amendment 18 was not made, Amendment 19 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 20 to Schedule 2 was **made** without division.

Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill was suspended until Monday 25th February 2013.

5. Adjournment

Mr Declan McAleer spoke to his topic regarding progress of the Education Campus at Lisanelly, Omagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.30pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

19 February 2013

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a Petition of Concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Tuesday 19 February 2013 in relation to Amendments 21, 24 and 26 proposed to the Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15).

- Mr Barry McElduff
- Mr Francie Molloy
- Mr Seán Lynch
- Mr Declan McAleer
- Mr Cathal Ó Hoisín
- Mr Fra McCann
- Mr Pat Sheehan
- Ms Sue Ramsey
- Mr Daithí McKay
- Mr Chris Hazzard
- Mr Alex Maskey
- Ms Caitríona Ruane
- Mr Phil Flanagan
- Mr Cathal Boylan
- Ms Rosaleen McCorley
- Ms Maeve McLaughlin
- Mr Oliver McMullan
- Ms Megan Fearon
- Mr Mickey Brady
- Mr John O'Dowd
- Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
- Mr Gerry Kelly
- Ms Jennifer McCann
- Ms Bronwyn McGahan
- Ms Micheala Boyle
- Mrs Michelle O'Neill
- Mr Martin McGuinness
- Mr Raymond McCartney
- Mr Pat Ramsey
- Mrs Karen McKevitt
- Mr Colum Eastwood
- Mr Sean Rogers
- Mr Conall McDevitt
- Mr Mark H Durkan
- Mr Joe Byrne
- Mrs Dolores Kelly
- Mr Patsy McGlone
- Mr Alban Maginness
- Mr John Dallat

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 February 2013
Division

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment 18

Proposed:

Schedule 2, Page 14, Line 26

At end insert -

'(c) a photograph taken as mentioned in sub-paragraph (a)(i) or (ii)'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 37
Noes: 50

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McCartney and Ms McCorley.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Craig, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Lunn and Mr G Robinson.

Question accordingly **negatived**.

Criminal Justice Bill
Marshalled List of Amendments
Consideration Stage
Tuesday 19 February 2013

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 14 February 2013 and selected for debate
The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses, Schedules and Long Title

Amendment 1
New Clause

A

After clause 1 insert -

'**Notification requirements: absence from notified residence**

1A.—(1) Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 85 insert—

"Notification requirements: absence from notified residence

85A.—(1) This section applies to a relevant offender at any time if the last home address notified by him under section 83(1), 84(1) or 85(1) was an address in Northern Ireland such as is mentioned in section 83(7)(a) (sole or main residence).

(2) If the relevant offender intends to be absent from that home address for a period of more than 3 days ("the relevant period"), the relevant offender must, not less than 12 hours before leaving that home address, notify to the police the information set out in subsection (3).

(3) The information is—

(a) the date on which the relevant offender will leave that home address;

(b) such details as the relevant offender holds about—

(i)his travel arrangements during the relevant period;

(ii)his accommodation arrangements during that period;

(iii)his date of return to that home address.

(4) In this section—

"travel arrangements" include, in particular, details of the means of transport to be used and the dates of travel,

"accommodation arrangements" include, in particular, the address of any accommodation at which the relevant offender will spend the night during the relevant period and the nature of that accommodation.

(5) Where—

(a) a relevant offender has given a notification under subsection (2), and

(b) at any time before that mentioned in that subsection, the information notified becomes inaccurate or incomplete,

the relevant offender must give a further notification under subsection (2).

(6) Where a relevant offender—

(a) has notified a date of return to his home address, but

(b) returns to his home address on a date other than that notified,

the relevant offender must notify the date of his actual return to the police within 3 days of his actual return.

(7) Nothing in this section requires an offender to notify any information which falls to be notified in accordance with a requirement imposed by regulations under section 86.

(8) In calculating the relevant period for the purposes of this section there is to be disregarded—

(a) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, an address of the kind mentioned in section 83(5)(g) notified to the police under section 83 or 85;

(b) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, any premises, if his stay at those premises would give rise to a requirement to notify the address of those premises under section 84(1)(c).

(9) This section applies in relation to any relevant period which begins on or after the day after the coming into operation of section *(Notification requirements: absence from notified residence)* of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.".

(3) In section 87(1) and (4) (method of notification) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)".

(4) In section 91 (offences)—

(a) in subsection (1)(a) after "85(1)" insert ", 85A(2) or (6)";

(b) in subsection (1)(b) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)";

(c) in subsection (3) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)".'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 2
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 31
Leave out '*an EEA State other than*' and insert '*a country outside*'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 3
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 32
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 4
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 35
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 5
Clause 3, Page 3, Line 14
Leave out 'State' and insert 'country'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 6
Clause 3, Page 3, Line 24

Leave out 'to the modifications set out below' and insert '—

(a) in all cases, to the modifications set out below; and

(b) in a case where the first condition mentioned in subsection (2) is met by reason of a conviction, finding or caution in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe, to the further provisions in section 96AA.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 7
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 18
Leave out 'State' and insert 'country'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 8
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 24
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 9
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 25

At end insert -

'**Convictions, etc. in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe**

96AA.—(1) The further provisions referred to in section 96A(5)(b) are as follows.

(2) Where P is charged with an offence under section 91(1)(a), it is a defence for P to prove that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(3) P shall cease to be subject to the notification requirements of this Part by virtue of section 96A if the High Court, on an application made by P in accordance with rules of court, so orders; but the High Court shall not make such an order unless it is satisfied that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(4) A conviction, finding or caution falls within this subsection if the relevant court is satisfied—

(a) that any investigations or proceedings leading to it were conducted in a way which contravened any of the Convention rights which P would have had if those investigations or proceedings had taken place in the United Kingdom; and

(b) that contravention was such that, in the opinion of the court, the conviction, finding or caution cannot safely be relied on for the purposes of meeting the condition in section 96A(2).

(5) In this section—

"the relevant conviction, finding or caution" means the conviction, finding or caution by reason of which P is subject, by virtue of section 96A, to the notification requirements of this Part;

"the relevant court" means—

(a) in a case to which subsection (2) applies, the court before which P is charged;

(b) in a case to which subsection (3) applies, the High Court.”.’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 10
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 26
Leave out from beginning to ‘section 97’ in line 29 and insert -
‘(3) Omit sections 97 to 101 (notification orders).

(4) Subsection (3) (and the related repeals in Part 1 of Schedule 4) do not affect the validity or effect of any order made under section 97 or 100’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 11
Clause 3, Page 4

Leave out line 33 and insert ‘for “98” substitute “96A(6)”’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 12
Clause 5, Page 6, Line 2
Leave out paragraph (a)

Minister of Justice

Amendment 13
New Clause
After clause 6 insert -
‘**Trafficking offences to be triable only on indictment**

6A.—(1) In section 57(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(2) In section 58(2) of that Act (trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(3) In section 59(2) of that Act (trafficking out of the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(4) In section 4(5) of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 (trafficking people for exploitation) omit paragraph (b).

(5) This section does not apply in relation to an offence committed before this section comes into operation.’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 14
New Clause
After Clause 7 insert -

‘*Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence*

Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

7A.—(1) In Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (child convicted of serious offence) for “notwithstanding any other provisions of this Order” substitute “subject to Articles 46 to 46B”.

(2) In Article 45 of that Order after paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) Where a court passes a sentence under paragraph (2), the court shall specify such part of the sentence as the court considers appropriate as the relevant part of the sentence for the purposes of Article 46 (release on licence).”.

(3) For Article 46 of that Order substitute—

“Release on licence

46.—(1) In this Article—

(a) “P” means a person detained under Article 45(2);

(b) “the Commissioners” means the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;

(c) “the Department” means the Department of Justice; and

(d) references to the relevant part of P’s sentence are references to the part of P’s sentence specified as such under Article 45(2A).

(2) As soon as—

(a) P has served the relevant part of P’s sentence, and

(b) the Commissioners have directed P’s release under this Article, the Department shall release P on licence.

(3) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (2) with respect to P unless—

(a) the Department has referred P’s case to the Commissioners; and

(b) the Commissioners are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(4) P may require the Department to refer P's case to the Commissioners at any time—

(a) after P has served the relevant part of P's sentence; and

(b) where there has been a previous reference of P's case to the Commissioners under paragraph (3) or Article 46B(4), after the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the disposal of that reference.

(5) In determining for the purposes of this Article whether P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, no account shall be taken of any time during which P was unlawfully at large, unless the Department otherwise directs.

(6) The Department may at any time release P on licence if it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist which justify P's release on compassionate grounds.

(7) Before releasing P under paragraph (6), the Department shall consult the Commissioners, unless the circumstances are such as to render such consultation impracticable.

(8) Nothing in this Article requires the Department to release a person in respect of a sentence under Article 45(2) at any time when that person is liable to be detained in respect of any other sentence.

Duration and conditions of licences under Article 46

46A.—(1) Where a person is released on licence under Article 46, the licence shall, unless previously revoked under Article 46B, remain in force until the expiry of the period for which the person was sentenced to be detained.

(2) A person released on licence under Article 46 shall comply with such conditions as may for the time being be specified in the licence (which may include on release conditions as to supervision by a probation officer).

(3) The Department of Justice shall not, except in accordance with recommendations of the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland—

(a) include a condition in a licence on release,

(b) subsequently insert a condition in a licence, or

(c) vary or cancel any condition in a licence.

Recall of licensees

46B.—(1) In this Article —

"P" means a person who has been released on licence under Article 46;

"the Commissioners" and "the Department" have the meanings given in Article 46(1).

(2) The Department may revoke P's licence and recall P to detention—

(a) if recommended to do so by the Commissioners, or

(b) without such a recommendation, if it appears to the Department that it is expedient in the public interest to recall P before such a recommendation is practicable.

(3) P—

(a) shall, on P's return to detention, be informed of the reasons for the recall and of the right conferred by sub-paragraph (b); and

(b) may make representations in writing to the Department with respect to the recall.

(4) The Department shall refer P's case to the Commissioners.

(5) Where on a reference under paragraph (4) the Commissioners direct P's immediate release on licence under Article 46, the Department shall give effect to the direction.

(6) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (5) unless they are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(7) On the revocation of P's licence, P shall be liable to be detained in pursuance of P's sentence and, if at large, shall be treated as being unlawfully at large.".

(4) In Article 46(3) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (functions of Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland) at the end add "or Articles 46 to 46B of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

(5) Where—

(a) on commencement a person is detained in pursuance of a sentence under Article 45(2) of the 1998 Order, and

(b) the Department, after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge if available, certifies its opinion that, if the amendments made by this section had been in operation at the time when that person was sentenced, the court by which that person was sentenced would have specified as the relevant part of the sentence such part as is specified in the certificate,

Article 46 of the 1998 Order (as substituted) shall apply as if the relevant part of that person's sentence for the purposes of that Article were the part specified in the certificate.

(6) But subsection (5) does not apply (and subsection (7) applies instead) where that person is a person whose licence has been revoked under Article 46(2) of the 1998 Order.

(7) Where this subsection applies, paragraphs (3) to (6) of Article 46B of the 1998 Order have effect as if that person had been recalled to prison under paragraph (2) of that Article on commencement.

(8) Articles 46A and 46B of the 1998 Order apply to an existing licensee as they apply to a person who is released on licence under Article 46 of that Order (as substituted).

(9) In this section—

"commencement" means the date on which this section comes into operation;

"existing licensee" means a person who, before commencement, has been discharged on licence under Article 46 of the 1998 Order and whose licence is in force on commencement;

"the 1998 Order" means the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 15
New Clause
After clause 7 insert -

'Examination of accused through intermediary

Examination of accused through intermediary

7B.—(1) In section 12(1) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (which at the passing of this Act is not in operation), the inserted Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of paragraph (2) insert "Subject to paragraph (2A),".

(3) After paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) A court may not give a direction under paragraph (3) unless—

(a) the court has been notified by the Department of Justice that arrangements for implementing such a direction have been made in relation to that court; and

(b) the notice has not been withdrawn.

(2B) The withdrawal of a notice given to a court under paragraph (2A) does not affect the operation of any direction under paragraph (3) given by that court before the notice is withdrawn.".'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 16
New Clause
After clause 7 insert -
'**Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as form of contempt of court**

7C.—(1) Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law.

(2) That abolition does not prevent proceedings for contempt of court being brought against a person for conduct that immediately before that abolition would have constituted both scandalising the judiciary and some other form of contempt of court.'

Chair, Committee for Justice

Amendment 17
Clause 9, Page 8, Line 2
Leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert -

'(1) Except as provided by subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent,

(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (*Notification requirements: absence from notified address*);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 18
Schedule 2, Page 14, Line 26
At end insert -

'(c) a photograph taken as mentioned in sub-paragraph (a)(i) or (ii)'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 19
Schedule 2, Page 14, Line 27
After 'Fingerprints' insert ', photographs'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 20
Schedule 2, Page 15, Line 14

Leave out from 'the conclusion' to end of line 17 and insert 'the Chief Constable determines that the material is of no evidential value in relation to—

(a) the investigation of the offence; or

(b) proceedings against any person for the offence.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 21
Schedule 2, Page 15, Line 41

Leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 16 and insert 'and

(c) the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Retention of Biometric Material has consented under Article 63DA to the retention of the material.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 22
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 1
Leave out paragraph (d) and insert -

'(d) the District Judge (Magistrates' Court) has made an order under paragraph (13) for the retention of the material.'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 23
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 26
Leave out paragraphs (11) and (12)

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 24
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 37
Leave out paragraph (13)

Minister of Justice

Amendment 25
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 37
Leave out 'Commissioner' and insert 'District Judge (Magistrates' Court)'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 26
Schedule 2, Page 17
Leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material by virtue of Article 63D(5): consent of Commissioner**

63DA.—(1) The Chief Constable may apply under paragraph (2) or (3) to the Commissioner appointed under Article 63D(11) for consent to the retention of Article 63B material which falls within Article 63D(5)(a) and (b).

(2) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that the material was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of an offence where any alleged victim of the offence was, at the time of the offence—

(a) under the age of 18,

(b) a vulnerable adult, or

(c) associated with the person to whom the material relates.

(3) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that—

(a) the material is not material to which paragraph (2) relates, but

(b) the retention of the material is necessary in the interests of public protection.

(4) The Department of Justice may by order amend paragraph (2) or (3).

(5) The Commissioner may, on an application under this Article, consent to the retention of material to which the application relates if the Commissioner considers that it is appropriate to retain the material.

(6) But where notice is given under paragraph (7) in relation to the application, the Commissioner must, before deciding whether or not to give consent, consider any representations by the person to whom the material relates which are made within the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the notice is given.

(7) The Chief Constable must give to the person to whom the material relates notice of—

(a) an application under this Article, and

(b) the right to make representations.

(8) Without prejudice to section 24 of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (service of documents), a notice under paragraph (7) may, in particular, be given to a person by sending it to the person by email or other electronic means.

(9) The requirement in paragraph (7) does not apply if the whereabouts of the person to whom the material relates is not known and cannot, after reasonable inquiry, be ascertained by the Chief Constable.

(10) An application or notice under this Article must be in writing.

(11) In this Article—

"victim" includes intended victim,

"vulnerable adult" means a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse or neglect is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, through old age or otherwise,

and the reference in paragraph (2)(c) to a person being associated with another person is to be read in accordance with Article 3(3) to (6) of the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 27
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material: persons completing diversionary youth conference**

63HB.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who has completed the diversionary youth conference process with respect to a recordable offence; and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.

(3) For the purposes of this Article, a person completes the diversionary youth conference process with respect to an offence if (and only if)—

(a) a diversionary youth conference under Part 3A of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 has been completed with respect to that person and that offence, and

(b) the Director of Public Prosecutions, having considered the report of the youth conference co-ordinator, has determined not to institute proceedings against the person in respect of the offence or, as the case may be, not to continue proceedings already instituted against the person in respect of the offence.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 28
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material: persons given a penalty notice**

63HC.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who is given a penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and in respect of whom no proceedings are brought for the offence to which the notice relates, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) from the person in connection with the investigation of the offence to which the notice relates.

(2) The material may be retained—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, for a period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken,

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, for a period of 2 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 29
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -

'Retention of Article 63B material: persons under 18 given a caution

63HA.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who—

(i)is given a caution in respect of a recordable offence which, at the time of the caution, the person admitted; and

(ii)is aged under 18 at the time of the offence, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.'

Mr Alban Maginness

Amendment 30
Schedule 2, Page 22, Line 32
Leave out 'do not'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 31
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 9
After 'fingerprints' insert ', photographs'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 32
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 12

Leave out from 'that has come' to the end of line 13 and insert 'which—

(a) has been taken by the police from a person —

(i)under a power conferred by Article 62 or 63; or

(ii)with the consent of that person, in connection with the investigation of an offence by the police;

(b) consists of or includes human cells; and

(c) was taken for the purpose of deriving a DNA profile from it;'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 33
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 29
Leave out 'which' and insert '—

(i)which was committed when that person was aged 18 or over, and

(ii) which'

Mr Alban Maginness

Amendment 34
Schedule 3, Page 24, Line 6
Leave out from beginning to "18(8)(b)" in line 9 and insert -

'5. In Article 89 (orders and regulations) after paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) An order under Article 63DA(4) shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.".

The Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 (c. 28)

6. In section 18(8)(c)'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 35
Schedule 4, Page 24, Line 17
At end insert -

‘PART 1

SEX OFFENDERS

Short Title	Extent of repeal
The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42)	Sections 97 to 101. In section 136(8) “101”. ’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 36
Schedule 4, Page 24
Leave out line 25 and insert -

	‘In section 4(5), paragraph (b) and the word “or” immediately before it. Section 5(1). Section 5(13).’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 37
Schedule 4, Page 24, Line 26, column 2
At beginning insert -

	‘Section 57(2)(a). Section 58(2)(a). Section 59(2)(a).’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 38
Long Title
Leave out ‘and to’ and insert ‘; to’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 39
Long Title
At end insert ‘; to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 40
Long Title
At end insert ‘; and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 41
Long Title
At end insert ‘and to abolish the common law offence of scandalising the judiciary’

Chair, Committee for Justice

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 19 February 2013

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

Improving Literacy and Numeracy Achievement in Schools (NIAO)

The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium Annual Report and Accounts for Year Ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only).

S. R. 2013/32 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling and Compensation Cap) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DSD).

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 19 February 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12				
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13			
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13					
Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13		

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13				

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 25 February 2013

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 Martyn Irvine – World Champion Track Cyclist

Mr Conall McDevitt made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to Martyn Irvine – World Champion Track Cyclist. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 25 February 2013 under SO 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 25 February 2013 be extended to no later than 8.00pm.

Mrs S Overend

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.2 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Robin Swann replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr R Swann
Mrs S Overend

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Resumption of Consideration Stage – Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15)

Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill was debated on Tuesday 19 February 2013 but the votes after Amendment 20 was deferred because a valid Petition of Concern was presented under Standing Order 28 on Tuesday 19 February 2013 in relation to Amendments 21, 24 and 26.

Schedules

Amendment 21 was not moved.

Amendment 22 to Schedule 2 was **negatived** (Division 1).

Amendment 23 to Schedule 2 was **negatived** (Division 2).

Amendment 24 was not moved.

As Amendment 22 was not made, Amendment 25 was not called.

As Amendment 24 was not made, Amendment 26 was not called.

Amendment 27 to Schedule 2 was **made** (Division 3).

Amendment 28 to Schedule 2 was **made** without division.

Amendment 29 to Schedule 2 was **made** (Division 4).

Amendment 30 was not moved.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 2 as amended stand part of the Bill.

As Amendments 18 and 19 were not made, Amendment 31 was not called.

Amendment 32 to Schedule 3 was **made** without division.

Amendment 33 to Schedule 3 was **made** (Division 5).

As Amendment 26 was not made, Amendment 34 was not called.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 3 as amended stand part of the Bill.

Amendment 35 to Schedule 4 was **made** without division.

Amendment 36 to Schedule 4 was **made** without division.

Amendment 37 to Schedule 4 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedule 4 as amended stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

Amendment 38 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

Amendment 39 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

Amendment 40 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

Amendment 41 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

The question being put, the Long Title, as amended, was **agreed** without division.

The Criminal Justice Bill NIA 10/11-15 stood referred to the Speaker.

4.2 Further Consideration Stage: Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15)

Proposed:

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15) stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.3 Final Stage: Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15)

Proposed:

The Minister for Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson. moved that the Final Stage of the Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Budget Bill (NIA 18/11-15) passed Final Stage with cross-community support.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Legislative Consent Motion: Antarctic Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension of the Antarctic Bill to Northern Ireland including the provision making the regulation of activities in Antarctica an excepted matter.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.2 Motion – Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Rates (Exemption for Automatic Telling Machines in Rural Areas) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

6.3 Motion – Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Rates (Regional Rates) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

6.4 Motion – Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the Rates (Temporary Rebate) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be affirmed.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Committee Business

7.1 Motion – Grassroot and Elite Sports Facilities

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the target in the Sport Matters strategy to have a minimum of 10 new or upgraded facilities by 2014 that will support player and athlete development in Olympic and Paralympic sports; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to consider prioritising funding towards grassroot sports and elite facilities from within her existing budget, to ensure that our sports people competing in future Olympic and Commonwealth Games are not disadvantaged as a result of lack of investment.

Chairperson, Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Private Members' Business

8.1 Motion – Graduate Programmes in the Agri-food Sector

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the importance of the agri-food sector to the Northern Ireland economy; believes that this sector has the potential for significant growth in the future; recognises the need for graduates in this area and calls on the Minister for Employment and Learning and the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to promote graduate programmes in this sector, particularly within our two universities.

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.50pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

25 February 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2013
Divisions

Division No. 1

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment No 22

Proposed:

In page 16, line 1, leave out paragraph (d) and insert

"(d) the District Judge (Magistrates' Court) has made an order under paragraph (13) for the retention of the material."

Mr McCartney

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 32
Noes: 56

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Ms McCorley

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy

Question accordingly **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2013
Divisions

Division No. 2

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment No 23

Proposed:

In page 16, line 26, leave out paragraphs (11) and (12).

Mr McCartney

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 32
Noes: 55

AYES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lynch and Ms McCorley

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy

Question accordingly **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2013
Divisions

Division No. 3

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment No 27

Proposed:

In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons completing diversionary youth conference

63HB.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who has completed the diversionary youth conference process with respect to a recordable offence; and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.

(3) For the purposes of this Article, a person completes the diversionary youth conference process with respect to an offence if (and only if)—

(a) a diversionary youth conference under Part 3A of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 has been completed with respect to that person and that offence, and

(b) the Director of Public Prosecutions, having considered the report of the youth conference co-ordinator, has determined not to institute proceedings against the person in respect of the offence or, as the case may be, not to continue proceedings already instituted against the person in respect of the offence."

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46
Noes: 45

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Lo and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

Question accordingly agreed to.

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2013
Divisions

Division No.4

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment No 29

Proposed:

In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons given a penalty notice

63HC.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who is given a penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and in respect of whom no proceedings are brought for the offence to which the notice relates, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) from the person in connection with the investigation of the offence to which the notice relates.

(2) The material may be retained—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, for a period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken,

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, for a period of 2 years beginning with —

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken." — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 29 proposed: In page 19, line 14, at end insert

"Retention of Article 63B material: persons under 18 given a caution

63HA.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which —

(a) relates to a person who —

(i) is given a caution in respect of a recordable offence which, at the time of the caution, the person admitted; and

(ii) is aged under 18 at the time of the offence, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until —

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with —

(i) the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii) if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken."

Mr A Maginness

Question put, That the amendment be **made**.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 46
Noes: 44

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Durkan.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

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

Question accordingly **agreed** to.

Northern Ireland Assembly

25 February 2013
Divisions

Division No. 5

Consideration Stage: Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) – Amendment No 33

Proposed:

In page 23, line 12, leave out from "that has come" to the end of line 13 and insert

"which—

(a) has been taken by the police from a person—

(i) under a power conferred by Article 62 or 63; or

(ii) with the consent of that person, in connection with the investigation of an offence by the police;

(b) consists of or includes human cells; and

(c) was taken for the purpose of deriving a DNA profile from it;". — [Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice).]

Amendment No 33 proposed: In page 23, line 29, leave out "which" and insert

"—

(i) which was committed when that person was aged 18 or over, and

(ii) which".

Mr A Maginness

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 47
Noes: 45

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

Question accordingly **agreed** to.

Criminal Justice Bill
Marshalled List of Amendments
Consideration Stage
Tuesday 19 February 2013

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 14 February 2013 and selected for debate
The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses, Schedules and Long Title

Amendment 1
New Clause

A

After clause 1 insert -

'**Notification requirements: absence from notified residence**

1A.—(1) Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 85 insert—

"Notification requirements: absence from notified residence

85A.—(1) This section applies to a relevant offender at any time if the last home address notified by him under section 83(1), 84(1) or 85(1) was an address in Northern Ireland such as is mentioned in section 83(7)(a) (sole or main residence).

(2) If the relevant offender intends to be absent from that home address for a period of more than 3 days ("the relevant period"), the relevant offender must, not less than 12 hours before leaving that home address, notify to the police the information set out in subsection (3).

(3) The information is—

(a) the date on which the relevant offender will leave that home address;

(b) such details as the relevant offender holds about—

(i)his travel arrangements during the relevant period;

(ii)his accommodation arrangements during that period;

(iii)his date of return to that home address.

(4) In this section—

"travel arrangements" include, in particular, details of the means of transport to be used and the dates of travel,

"accommodation arrangements" include, in particular, the address of any accommodation at which the relevant offender will spend the night during the relevant period and the nature of that accommodation.

(5) Where—

(a) a relevant offender has given a notification under subsection (2), and

(b) at any time before that mentioned in that subsection, the information notified becomes inaccurate or incomplete,

the relevant offender must give a further notification under subsection (2).

(6) Where a relevant offender—

(a) has notified a date of return to his home address, but

(b) returns to his home address on a date other than that notified,

the relevant offender must notify the date of his actual return to the police within 3 days of his actual return.

(7) Nothing in this section requires an offender to notify any information which falls to be notified in accordance with a requirement imposed by regulations under section 86.

(8) In calculating the relevant period for the purposes of this section there is to be disregarded—

(a) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, an address of the kind mentioned in section 83(5)(g) notified to the police under section 83 or 85;

(b) any period or periods which the relevant offender intends to spend at, or travelling directly to or from, any premises, if his stay at those premises would give rise to a requirement to notify the address of those premises under section 84(1)(c).

(9) This section applies in relation to any relevant period which begins on or after the day after the coming into operation of section *(Notification requirements: absence from notified residence)* of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.".

(3) In section 87(1) and (4) (method of notification) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)".

(4) In section 91 (offences)—

(a) in subsection (1)(a) after "85(1)" insert ", 85A(2) or (6)";

(b) in subsection (1)(b) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)";

(c) in subsection (3) for "or 85(1)" substitute ", 85(1) or 85A(2) or (6)".'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 2
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 31
Leave out '*an EEA State other than*' and insert '*a country outside*'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 3
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 32
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 4
Clause 3, Page 2, Line 35
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 5
Clause 3, Page 3, Line 14
Leave out 'State' and insert 'country'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 6
Clause 3, Page 3, Line 24

Leave out 'to the modifications set out below' and insert '—

(a) in all cases, to the modifications set out below; and

(b) in a case where the first condition mentioned in subsection (2) is met by reason of a conviction, finding or caution in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe, to the further provisions in section 96AA.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 7
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 18
Leave out 'State' and insert 'country'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 8
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 24
Leave out 'an EEA State other than' and insert 'a country outside'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 9
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 25

At end insert -

'**Convictions, etc. in a country which is not a member of the Council of Europe**

96AA.—(1) The further provisions referred to in section 96A(5)(b) are as follows.

(2) Where P is charged with an offence under section 91(1)(a), it is a defence for P to prove that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(3) P shall cease to be subject to the notification requirements of this Part by virtue of section 96A if the High Court, on an application made by P in accordance with rules of court, so orders; but the High Court shall not make such an order unless it is satisfied that the relevant conviction, finding or caution falls within subsection (4).

(4) A conviction, finding or caution falls within this subsection if the relevant court is satisfied—

(a) that any investigations or proceedings leading to it were conducted in a way which contravened any of the Convention rights which P would have had if those investigations or proceedings had taken place in the United Kingdom; and

(b) that contravention was such that, in the opinion of the court, the conviction, finding or caution cannot safely be relied on for the purposes of meeting the condition in section 96A(2).

(5) In this section—

"the relevant conviction, finding or caution" means the conviction, finding or caution by reason of which P is subject, by virtue of section 96A, to the notification requirements of this Part;

"the relevant court" means—

(a) in a case to which subsection (2) applies, the court before which P is charged;

(b) in a case to which subsection (3) applies, the High Court.”.’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 10
Clause 3, Page 4, Line 26
Leave out from beginning to ‘section 97’ in line 29 and insert -
‘(3) Omit sections 97 to 101 (notification orders).

(4) Subsection (3) (and the related repeals in Part 1 of Schedule 4) do not affect the validity or effect of any order made under section 97 or 100’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 11
Clause 3, Page 4

Leave out line 33 and insert ‘for “98” substitute “96A(6)”’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 12
Clause 5, Page 6, Line 2
Leave out paragraph (a)

Minister of Justice

Amendment 13
New Clause
After clause 6 insert -
‘**Trafficking offences to be triable only on indictment**

6A.—(1) In section 57(2) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(2) In section 58(2) of that Act (trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(3) In section 59(2) of that Act (trafficking out of the UK for sexual exploitation) omit paragraph (a).

(4) In section 4(5) of the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 (trafficking people for exploitation) omit paragraph (b).

(5) This section does not apply in relation to an offence committed before this section comes into operation.’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 14
New Clause
After Clause 7 insert -

‘*Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence*

Release on licence of child convicted of serious offence

7A.—(1) In Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (child convicted of serious offence) for “notwithstanding any other provisions of this Order” substitute “subject to Articles 46 to 46B”.

(2) In Article 45 of that Order after paragraph (2) insert—

“(2A) Where a court passes a sentence under paragraph (2), the court shall specify such part of the sentence as the court considers appropriate as the relevant part of the sentence for the purposes of Article 46 (release on licence).”.

(3) For Article 46 of that Order substitute—

“Release on licence

46.—(1) In this Article—

(a) “P” means a person detained under Article 45(2);

(b) “the Commissioners” means the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland;

(c) “the Department” means the Department of Justice; and

(d) references to the relevant part of P’s sentence are references to the part of P’s sentence specified as such under Article 45(2A).

(2) As soon as—

(a) P has served the relevant part of P’s sentence, and

(b) the Commissioners have directed P’s release under this Article,

the Department shall release P on licence.

(3) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (2) with respect to P unless—

(a) the Department has referred P’s case to the Commissioners; and

(b) the Commissioners are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(4) P may require the Department to refer P's case to the Commissioners at any time—

(a) after P has served the relevant part of P's sentence; and

(b) where there has been a previous reference of P's case to the Commissioners under paragraph (3) or Article 46B(4), after the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the disposal of that reference.

(5) In determining for the purposes of this Article whether P has served the relevant part of P's sentence, no account shall be taken of any time during which P was unlawfully at large, unless the Department otherwise directs.

(6) The Department may at any time release P on licence if it is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist which justify P's release on compassionate grounds.

(7) Before releasing P under paragraph (6), the Department shall consult the Commissioners, unless the circumstances are such as to render such consultation impracticable.

(8) Nothing in this Article requires the Department to release a person in respect of a sentence under Article 45(2) at any time when that person is liable to be detained in respect of any other sentence.

Duration and conditions of licences under Article 46

46A.—(1) Where a person is released on licence under Article 46, the licence shall, unless previously revoked under Article 46B, remain in force until the expiry of the period for which the person was sentenced to be detained.

(2) A person released on licence under Article 46 shall comply with such conditions as may for the time being be specified in the licence (which may include on release conditions as to supervision by a probation officer).

(3) The Department of Justice shall not, except in accordance with recommendations of the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland—

(a) include a condition in a licence on release,

(b) subsequently insert a condition in a licence, or

(c) vary or cancel any condition in a licence.

Recall of licensees

46B.—(1) In this Article —

"P" means a person who has been released on licence under Article 46;

"the Commissioners" and "the Department" have the meanings given in Article 46(1).

(2) The Department may revoke P's licence and recall P to detention—

(a) if recommended to do so by the Commissioners, or

(b) without such a recommendation, if it appears to the Department that it is expedient in the public interest to recall P before such a recommendation is practicable.

(3) P—

(a) shall, on P's return to detention, be informed of the reasons for the recall and of the right conferred by sub-paragraph (b); and

(b) may make representations in writing to the Department with respect to the recall.

(4) The Department shall refer P's case to the Commissioners.

(5) Where on a reference under paragraph (4) the Commissioners direct P's immediate release on licence under Article 46, the Department shall give effect to the direction.

(6) The Commissioners shall not give a direction under paragraph (5) unless they are satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public from serious harm that P should be detained.

(7) On the revocation of P's licence, P shall be liable to be detained in pursuance of P's sentence and, if at large, shall be treated as being unlawfully at large.".

(4) In Article 46(3) of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 (functions of Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland) at the end add "or Articles 46 to 46B of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

(5) Where—

(a) on commencement a person is detained in pursuance of a sentence under Article 45(2) of the 1998 Order, and

(b) the Department, after consultation with the Lord Chief Justice and the trial judge if available, certifies its opinion that, if the amendments made by this section had been in operation at the time when that person was sentenced, the court by which that person was sentenced would have specified as the relevant part of the sentence such part as is specified in the certificate,

Article 46 of the 1998 Order (as substituted) shall apply as if the relevant part of that person's sentence for the purposes of that Article were the part specified in the certificate.

(6) But subsection (5) does not apply (and subsection (7) applies instead) where that person is a person whose licence has been revoked under Article 46(2) of the 1998 Order.

(7) Where this subsection applies, paragraphs (3) to (6) of Article 46B of the 1998 Order have effect as if that person had been recalled to prison under paragraph (2) of that Article on commencement.

(8) Articles 46A and 46B of the 1998 Order apply to an existing licensee as they apply to a person who is released on licence under Article 46 of that Order (as substituted).

(9) In this section—

"commencement" means the date on which this section comes into operation;

"existing licensee" means a person who, before commencement, has been discharged on licence under Article 46 of the 1998 Order and whose licence is in force on commencement;

"the 1998 Order" means the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 15
New Clause
After clause 7 insert -

'Examination of accused through intermediary

Examination of accused through intermediary

7B.—(1) In section 12(1) of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (which at the passing of this Act is not in operation), the inserted Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is amended as follows.

(2) At the beginning of paragraph (2) insert "Subject to paragraph (2A),".

(3) After paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) A court may not give a direction under paragraph (3) unless—

(a) the court has been notified by the Department of Justice that arrangements for implementing such a direction have been made in relation to that court; and

(b) the notice has not been withdrawn.

(2B) The withdrawal of a notice given to a court under paragraph (2A) does not affect the operation of any direction under paragraph (3) given by that court before the notice is withdrawn.".'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 16
New Clause
After clause 7 insert -
'**Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as form of contempt of court**

7C.—(1) Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is abolished as a form of contempt of court under the common law.

(2) That abolition does not prevent proceedings for contempt of court being brought against a person for conduct that immediately before that abolition would have constituted both scandalising the judiciary and some other form of contempt of court.'

Chair, Committee for Justice

Amendment 17
Clause 9, Page 8, Line 2
Leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert -

'(1) Except as provided by subsection (2), this Act comes into operation on the day after Royal Assent,

(2) The following provisions of this Act come into operation on such day or days as the Department may by order appoint—

(a) section 1 and Schedule 1;

(b) section (*Notification requirements: absence from notified address*);

(c) sections 3 and 4;

(d) section 7 and Schedules 2 and 3;

(e) Parts 1 and 3 of Schedule 4 and section 8 so far as relating thereto.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 18
Schedule 2, Page 14, Line 26
At end insert -

'(c) a photograph taken as mentioned in sub-paragraph (a)(i) or (ii)'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 19
Schedule 2, Page 14, Line 27
After 'Fingerprints' insert ', photographs'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 20
Schedule 2, Page 15, Line 14

Leave out from 'the conclusion' to end of line 17 and insert 'the Chief Constable determines that the material is of no evidential value in relation to—

(a) the investigation of the offence; or

(b) proceedings against any person for the offence.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 21
Schedule 2, Page 15, Line 41

Leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 16 and insert 'and

(c) the Northern Ireland Commissioner for the Retention of Biometric Material has consented under Article 63DA to the retention of the material.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 22
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 1
Leave out paragraph (d) and insert -

'(d) the District Judge (Magistrates' Court) has made an order under paragraph (13) for the retention of the material.'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 23
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 26
Leave out paragraphs (11) and (12)

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 24
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 37
Leave out paragraph (13)

Minister of Justice

Amendment 25
Schedule 2, Page 16, Line 37
Leave out 'Commissioner' and insert 'District Judge (Magistrates' Court)'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 26
Schedule 2, Page 17
Leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material by virtue of Article 63D(5): consent of Commissioner**

63DA.—(1) The Chief Constable may apply under paragraph (2) or (3) to the Commissioner appointed under Article 63D(11) for consent to the retention of Article 63B material which falls within Article 63D(5)(a) and (b).

(2) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that the material was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of an offence where any alleged victim of the offence was, at the time of the offence—

(a) under the age of 18,

(b) a vulnerable adult, or

(c) associated with the person to whom the material relates.

(3) The Chief Constable may make an application under this paragraph if the Chief Constable considers that—

(a) the material is not material to which paragraph (2) relates, but

(b) the retention of the material is necessary in the interests of public protection.

(4) The Department of Justice may by order amend paragraph (2) or (3).

(5) The Commissioner may, on an application under this Article, consent to the retention of material to which the application relates if the Commissioner considers that it is appropriate to retain the material.

(6) But where notice is given under paragraph (7) in relation to the application, the Commissioner must, before deciding whether or not to give consent, consider any representations by the person to whom the material relates which are made within the period of 28 days beginning with the day on which the notice is given.

(7) The Chief Constable must give to the person to whom the material relates notice of—

(a) an application under this Article, and

(b) the right to make representations.

(8) Without prejudice to section 24 of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 (service of documents), a notice under paragraph (7) may, in particular, be given to a person by sending it to the person by email or other electronic means.

(9) The requirement in paragraph (7) does not apply if the whereabouts of the person to whom the material relates is not known and cannot, after reasonable inquiry, be ascertained by the Chief Constable.

(10) An application or notice under this Article must be in writing.

(11) In this Article—

"victim" includes intended victim,

"vulnerable adult" means a person aged 18 or over whose ability to protect himself or herself from violence, abuse or neglect is significantly impaired through physical or mental disability or illness, through old age or otherwise,

and the reference in paragraph (2)(c) to a person being associated with another person is to be read in accordance with Article 3(3) to (6) of the Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 27
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material: persons completing diversionary youth conference**

63HB.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who has completed the diversionary youth conference process with respect to a recordable offence; and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.

(3) For the purposes of this Article, a person completes the diversionary youth conference process with respect to an offence if (and only if)—

(a) a diversionary youth conference under Part 3A of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 has been completed with respect to that person and that offence, and

(b) the Director of Public Prosecutions, having considered the report of the youth conference co-ordinator, has determined not to institute proceedings against the person in respect of the offence or, as the case may be, not to continue proceedings already instituted against the person in respect of the offence.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 28
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -
'**Retention of Article 63B material: persons given a penalty notice**

63HC.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who is given a penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and in respect of whom no proceedings are brought for the offence to which the notice relates, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) from the person in connection with the investigation of the offence to which the notice relates.

(2) The material may be retained—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, for a period of 2 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken,

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, for a period of 2 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 29
Schedule 2, Page 19, Line 14
At end insert -

'Retention of Article 63B material: persons under 18 given a caution

63HA.—(1) This Article applies to Article 63B material which—

(a) relates to a person who—

(i)is given a caution in respect of a recordable offence which, at the time of the caution, the person admitted; and

(ii)is aged under 18 at the time of the offence, and

(b) was taken (or, in the case of a DNA profile, derived from a sample taken) in connection with the investigation of the offence.

(2) The material may be retained until—

(a) in the case of fingerprints, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with the date on which the fingerprints were taken, and

(b) in the case of a DNA profile, the end of the period of 5 years beginning with—

(i)the date on which the DNA sample from which the profile was derived was taken, or

(ii)if the profile was derived from more than one DNA sample, the date on which the first of those samples was taken.'

Mr Alban Maginness

Amendment 30
Schedule 2, Page 22, Line 32
Leave out 'do not'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 31
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 9
After 'fingerprints' insert ', photographs'

Mr Raymond McCartney
Mr Seán Lynch
Ms Rosaleen McCorley

Amendment 32
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 12

Leave out from 'that has come' to the end of line 13 and insert 'which—

(a) has been taken by the police from a person —

(i)under a power conferred by Article 62 or 63; or

(ii)with the consent of that person, in connection with the investigation of an offence by the police;

(b) consists of or includes human cells; and

(c) was taken for the purpose of deriving a DNA profile from it;'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 33
Schedule 3, Page 23, Line 29
Leave out 'which' and insert '—

(i)which was committed when that person was aged 18 or over, and

(ii) which'

Mr Alban Maginness

Amendment 34
Schedule 3, Page 24, Line 6
Leave out from beginning to "18(8)(b)" in line 9 and insert -

'5. In Article 89 (orders and regulations) after paragraph (2) insert—

"(2A) An order under Article 63DA(4) shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, the Assembly.".

The Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 (c. 28)

6. In section 18(8)(c)'

Minister of Justice

Amendment 35
Schedule 4, Page 24, Line 17
At end insert -

‘PART 1

SEX OFFENDERS

Short Title	Extent of repeal
The Sexual Offences Act 2003 (c. 42)	Sections 97 to 101. In section 136(8) “101”. ’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 36
Schedule 4, Page 24
Leave out line 25 and insert -

	‘In section 4(5), paragraph (b) and the word “or” immediately before it. Section 5(1). Section 5(13).’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 37
Schedule 4, Page 24, Line 26, column 2
At beginning insert -

	‘Section 57(2)(a). Section 58(2)(a). Section 59(2)(a).’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 38
Long Title
Leave out ‘and to’ and insert ‘; to’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 39
Long Title
At end insert ‘; to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under Article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 40
Long Title
At end insert ‘; and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999’

Minister of Justice

Amendment 41
Long Title
At end insert ‘and to abolish the common law offence of scandalising the judiciary’

Chair, Committee for Justice

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 19 - 25 February 2013

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

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Management of Response Maintenance Contracts (NIA 99/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee).

Report on the Estimate of the Northern Ireland Audit Office 2013-14 (NIA 93/11-15) (Audit Committee).

Financial Assistance for Political Parties Scheme 2013 (NIA 101/11-15) (Assembly Commission).

Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules to the Assembly and the Appropriate Committees 22 February 2013 (NIA 100/11-15) (Examiner of Statutory Rules).

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/30 The Forestry Land Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

For Information Only:

S. R. 2013/31 (C. 1) The Forestry (2010 Act) (Commencement No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD).

S. R. 2013/33 (C. 2) The Waste (Amendment) (2007 Order) (Commencement No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE).

S. R. 2013/34 (C. 3) The Waste and Contaminated Land (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOE).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on Proposed Amendments to the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme to reflect Workplace Pension Reform, and Miscellaneous Amendments (DE).

Consultation Paper on the 2012 Review of Shellfish Water Designations Under The Shellfish Waters Directive; and The Protection of Shellfish Waters Beyond 2013 (DOE).

9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Police Fund Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13 (DOJ).

Assembly Consent Memorandum on The Public Bodies (Abolition of the British Shipbuilders) Order 2013 (DETI).

Assembly Consent Memorandum on the Public Bodies (Abolition of the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Arbitration Tribunal (Order 2013) (DETI).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 26 February 2013

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 – Social Housing Reform

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, made a statement regarding Social Housing Reform, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

2.2 Statement – Area Planning

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding Area Planning following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Motion - Draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013

Proposed:

That the draft Companies (Public Sector Audit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 be approved.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to this motion under Standing Order 28, on Monday 25 February 2013 (Appendix 1).

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the establishment of an ad hoc committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly.

Ms C Ruane
Mr P Ramsey

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.38pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

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.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee

The Speaker took the Chair.

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote (Division).

5.2 Motion - Entitlement Framework Funding and Strategy for 14-19 Year Olds

Proposed:

That this Assembly, in light of Recommendation 9 of the Review of the Common Funding Scheme and the concerns being expressed by schools and further education colleges, calls on the Minister of Education to extend the funding earmarked for the Entitlement Framework to the 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years; and further calls on the Minister of Education to work with the Minister for Employment and Learning to bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a common funding approach for all pupils and students within a coherent strategy for 14 to 19 year olds.

Mr M Storey
Miss M McIlveen
Mr J Craig

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Speaker took the Chair.

6. Adjournment

Mr Paul Givan spoke to his topic regarding the John Lewis Sprucefield Retail Development.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.27pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

26 February 2013

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a Petition of Concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 25 February 2013 in relation to the following motion:

Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee

That this Assembly approves the establishment of an ad hoc committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly.

- Mr Sydney Anderson
- Mr Jonathan Bell
- Ms Paula Bradley
- Ms Pam Brown
- Mr Thomas Buchanan
- Mr Gregory Campbell
- Mr Trevor Clarke
- Mr Jonathan Craig
- Mr Sammy Douglas
- Mr Gordon Dunne
- Mr Alex Easton
- Mrs Arlene Foster
- Mr Paul Frew
- Mr Paul Girvan
- Mr Paul Givan
- Mrs Brenda Hale
- Mr Simon Hamilton
- Mr David Hilditch
- Mr William Humphrey
- Mr William Irwin
- Mr Nelson McCausland
- Mr Ian McCrea
- Mr David McIlveen
- Miss Michelle McIlveen
- Mr Adrian McQuillan
- The Lord Morrow
- Mr Stephen Moutray
- Mr Robin Newton
- Mr Edwin Poots
- Mr George Robinson
- Mr Peter Robinson
- Mr Alastair Ross
- Mr Jimmy Spratt
- Mr Mervyn Storey
- Mr Peter Weir
- Mr Jim Wells
- Mr Sammy Wilson

Northern Ireland Assembly

26 February 2013
Division

Motion - Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the establishment of an ad hoc committee to deal with issues surrounding flags, emblems, symbols and language at Parliament Buildings and to report to the Assembly.

Ms C Ruane
Mr P Ramsey

Question put.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48
Noes: 46

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other:

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

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

Total votes	94	Total Ayes	48	[51.1%]
Nationalist Vote	40	Nationalist Ayes	40	[100.0%]
Unionist Votes	46	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	8	[100.0%]

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result:

Mr Agnew.

The Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 26 February 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Welfare Reform Bill (NIA 74/11-15) (Committee for Social Development).

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/37 The Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DEL).

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Community Resuscitation Strategy (DHSSPS).

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 26 February 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12	19.02.13 & 25.02.13			
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13	25.02.13		
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13					
Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13	25.02.13	

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13				

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 4 March 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Committee Chairperson Appointment

The Deputy Speaker informed Members that the Speaker had received correspondence from the nominating officer of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Mike Nesbitt, nominating Mr Robin Swann as Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning with immediate effect. The Deputy Speaker confirmed the appointment.

2.2 Further Consideration Stage – Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15)

The Deputy Speaker informed the House that the Speaker had received written notification from the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, that he would not be in a position to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill on Tuesday 5 March 2013. The Deputy Speaker advised the House that the Bill stage would be rescheduled by the Business Committee.

3. Matter of the Day

3.1 Mortar bombs found in Londonderry

Mr Gregory Campbell made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the mortar bombs found in Londonderry. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

4. Assembly Business

4.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Basil McCrea replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; and that Mr Sean Rogers replace Mr John McCallister as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Mr P Ramsey
Mrs K McKevitt

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Executive Committee Business

5.1 Assembly Consent Motion - The Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013

Proposed:

That this Assembly consents to the Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013 in the form of the draft laid before the UK Parliament on 12 December 2012.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion: Benefit Advice and Awareness

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the challenges facing the advice sector and the need for individuals to have access to advice and assistance in relation to their welfare rights; and calls on the Minister for Social Development to devise an advice services strategy, to develop an awareness campaign for individuals and to provide adequate funding for independent advice providers.

Mr M Durkan
Mrs K McKevitt
Mr C Eastwood
Mr D Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.2 Motion: Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; supports the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates; welcomes the recognition within the Bill that political donations in Northern Ireland require sensitivity; acknowledges that further work is needed on measures that are still under consideration for potential inclusion in the Bill, including the creation of a formal opposition in the Assembly, the size of the Assembly and the length of the Assembly term; and calls on all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster, or to forfeit the expenses that they claim from Parliament.

Mr M Nesbitt
Mr T Elliott
Mrs S Overend

6.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out from 'welcomes' to 'sensitivity' and substitute:

'believes that the declaration and publication of donations to political parties in Northern Ireland should be handled in the same manner as donations to political parties in Great Britain'

Mr C Lyttle
Mr S Dickson
Ms A Lo

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

7. Question Time

7.1 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

7.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

8. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion: Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill (cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division 2).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

8.2 Motion: Local Meat Products

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes Northern Ireland's excellent reputation for producing high quality food; expresses concern at the on-going incidents surrounding meat products; encourages retailers to source more food products from Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to work with retailers to ensure that processors and farmers get a better return for their products.

Mr P Frew
Mr G Dunne
Mr W Irwin

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.40pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

4 March 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 March 2013
Divisions

Division No. 1

Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out from 'welcomes' to 'sensitivity' and substitute:

'believes that the declaration and publication of donations to political parties in Northern Ireland should be handled in the same manner as donations to political parties in Great Britain'

Mr C Lyttle
Mr S Dickson
Ms A Lo

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 12
Noes: 69

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr B McCrea.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Lunn and Mr McCarthy.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Byrne, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Overend and Mr Spratt.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 March 2013
Divisions

Division No. 2

Draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill – Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the publication of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; supports the commitment to bring to an end the practice of dual mandates; welcomes the recognition within the Bill that political donations in Northern Ireland require sensitivity; acknowledges that further work is needed on measures that are still under consideration for potential inclusion in the Bill, including the creation of a formal opposition in the Assembly, the size of the Assembly and the length of the Assembly term; and calls on all political parties which support inclusive and consensual politics to play a full role at Westminster, or to forfeit the expenses that they claim from Parliament.

Mr M Nesbitt
Mr T Elliott
Mrs S Overend

Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 47
Noes: 32

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Sheehan.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 27 February – 4 March 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Criminal Justice Bill (as amended at consideration stage) (NIA Bill 10/11-15)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

The Sports Council for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL).

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Investment Account (DOJ).

National Museums Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2011-12 (DCAL).

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill (NIA 97/11-15) (Committee for Finance and Personnel).

Report on the Inquiry into Maximising the Creative Industries in Northern Ireland (NIA 98/11-15) (Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure).

Report on the Safety of Services Provided by Health and Social Care Trusts (NIA 102/11-15) (Public Accounts Committee).

6. Statutory Rules

S. R. 2013/35 Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (DOJ).

For Information Only:

S. I. 2013/0000 Draft Statutory Instrument The CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme Order 2013 (DOE).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Transport Northern Ireland (DRD).

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

Safeguards to Protect the Individual Decisions on the Granting of Civil Legal Aid: A Department of Justice Consultation Document (DOJ).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Belfast Healthy City Annual Review 2011-12 (Belfast Healthy Cities).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 5 March 2013

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

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Final Stage: Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15)

Proposed:

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved that the Final Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15) do now pass

Debate ensued.

The Water and Sewerage (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15) passed Final Stage.

2.2 Further Consideration Stage – Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15)

The Further Consideration Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 10/11-15) stood on the Order Paper in the name of the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

The Further Consideration Stage was **not moved**.

The sitting was suspended at 11.05am.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

4.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Michelle O'Neill.

4. Adjournment

Mr Jonathan Craig spoke to his topic regarding the road infrastructure of the M1 link to the Maze site.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.32pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

5 March 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 5 March 2013

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 Water's Response to a Suspected Fraud (NIAO)

5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 5 March 2013

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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12	21.01.13	29.01.13	11.02.13	
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12	19.02.13 & 25.02.13			
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	18.01.13
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	19.02.13	14.02.13				
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	08.04.13					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12	23.01.13	12.02.13	25.02.13	05.03.13	
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13	22.01.13	07.06.13					
Budget Bill NIA Bill 18/11-15	11.02.13	12.02.13	N/A	N/A	18.02.13	19.02.13	25.02.13	

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13	13.02.13				

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.