
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 26 September 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Bland v Irish Government

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will raise the case of Bland v Irish Government with the Taoiseach at the British-Irish Council, with a view to getting a commitment from the Irish Government that they will resolve all outstanding matters in this case, apologize for the injustice inflicted on the Bland family and pay adequate compensation. (AQW 416/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Justice issues do not form part of the work programme for the British-Irish Council (BIC) at present. It would therefore not be appropriate to raise the Bland case with the Taoiseach at a BIC.

This matter was previously debated in the Assembly as Private Members' Business in November 2007 and we are aware of the cross-party support for the Bland family.

Appointments to Public Bodies and Advisory Boards

Mr McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide the criteria for appointments to public bodies and advisory boards, particularly in relation to residency and nationality; and to detail the applicable equality legislation. (AQW 426/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The criteria for appointments to public bodies and advisory boards, including residency and nationality requirements (if appropriate), are the responsibility of each Departmental Minister or Ministers to

determine, taking into consideration the requirements for each position and having had due regard to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

New Build Construction and Investment Schemes

Mr McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the economic downturn, what Executive proposals have been considered to bring forward major new build construction and investment schemes. (AQW 473/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are conscious of these issues and recently met with representatives of the Construction Industry to discuss the impact on the sector of the difficulties in financial markets, and in the commercial and domestic property markets. We had a useful discussion and follow up work is planned involving the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Strategic Investment Board to explore what further assistance we could provide to the sector.

The Executive has of course to work within finite capital budgets, but we have made clear our aim to see the delivery of the substantial programmes set out in the Investment Strategy. We are monitoring progress in this regard.

We undertook to discuss the issues raised with the SIB, particularly around the transparency of actual construction costs in major projects and around timetabling and delays.

We also offered our help in acting as a conduit between the sector and the financial institutions.

Child Poverty

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it is on course to eradicate child poverty, as stated in the Programme for Government. (AQW 474/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Tackling child poverty is an urgent priority for us. Junior Ministers, in line with their responsibility for children and young people, will bring an early focus to this issue through the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People.

In adopting the target to 'eliminate' child poverty it is generally accepted that child poverty would be treated as being 'eliminated' if it were among the best in Europe by the target date of 2020.

Current data indicates that some progress has been met over recent years. However the current global economic climate and rising costs of living will have

an impact. We are currently assessing how this new climate will affect progress.

Children's Champion

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide details of (i) the recent appointment of a children's champion; and (ii) any targets or programmes the Department has undertaken to promote children's rights. (AQW 480/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister:

(i) The suggestion by the Commissioner for Children and Young People to have a dedicated Champion for Children at senior level in each department was discussed at the first meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People on 13th March and subsequently agreed by all Ministers.

The Champion for Children and Young People in our department is Colin Jack, Head of Good Relations and Reconciliation Division and the chair of the Champions for Children and Young People's group is Eddie Rooney, Director of the Equality Directorate in OFMDFM. Responsibility for Children and Young People falls within this directorate.

The role of the Champion for Children and Young People is to:

- Liaise with, inform and advise the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to help drive forward agreed policy and to act as a senior point of contact within the department in relation to the Sub-Committee;
- support the department's role in enabling the relevant sub-groups of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to progress and produce focused achievable recommendations; and
- advise and liaise with departmental colleagues on the contribution to the 10 year strategy action planning process and raise awareness at Departmental Board level to encourage departments to ensure children's and young people's interests are fostered and their views sought on policy and strategy issues.

The first meeting of the 'Champions for Children and Young People' took place on 5th August.

(ii) Our department has a PSA target under PSA 6 – 'Ensure the central role of the rights of the child'. To deliver on this target and promote children's rights we will be distributing child rights awareness material to all children and young people which have been specifically designed to detail the articles in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in a way which will be easily understood.

We are fully committed to respecting and progressing the rights of children and young people here and will be guided and informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Action Plans for the 10-year Strategy for Children and Young People will be the key mechanism by which we will chart progress on this commitment and we hope to discuss the next draft Action Plan with the OFMDFM Committee in the near future.

As part of our commitment to improving the lives of children and young people, Junior Ministers were given particular responsibility for children and young people in June 2007. The specific focus the role of the Junior Ministers brings helps to ensure that both their needs and rights are being met and that key issues are kept high on the agenda of this government.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is 'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'.

The Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young people has identified 6 key priorities and established cross departmental sub-groups to take work forward. It has agreed that 'engaging with and hearing the voice of children and young people' should underpin the work of both the sub-groups and the Ministerial Sub-Committee in line with article 12 of the convention.

Furthermore, our department funds the Participation Network to raise awareness among policy makers across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) of the need to engage with children and young people on matters which impact on their lives.

We have recently established the Strategy Review Planning Group which will be examining and reviewing all aspects of the 10-year strategy. A wide number of voluntary groups from the sector sit on this, including the Children's Law Centre.

We will continue to look for ways to raise awareness of children's rights among both children and adults.

North/South Co-Operation

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many additional areas of North/South co-operation have been (a) suggested by Ministers in the Executive; (b) agreed; and (c) not agreed, since restoration of devolution. (AQW 570/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not practice to disclose details of business discussed in the Executive. The content of Executive papers, including draft papers, is confidential.

Civic Forum

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it expects to make an announcement on whether it will reconstitute the Civic Forum. (AQW 572/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The consultation phase of the review of the Civic Forum which began in May has completed. The review team is currently analysing the information assembled, including consultation responses, with a view to presenting recommendations and options to us in the near future.

Sustainable Development Commission

Mr Ford asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to the answer to AQW 305/09, to confirm when the post of the Commissioner on the Sustainable Development Commission will be filled. (AQW 681/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have nothing further to add to our answers to AQW 305/09 (Official report dated Friday 19 September 2008) and AQW 137/09 (Official report dated Friday 12 September 2008).

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Applicants to Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm businesses have applied to join the Countryside Management Scheme, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 313/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): I am not able to supply the number of applications to the new Countryside Management Scheme broken down by parliamentary constituency. However I can confirm that at 15 September 2008, a total of 4428 applications had been acknowledged which when broken down by county equates to:

Antrim	812
Armagh	595
Derry	561

Down	507
Fermanagh	849
Tyrone	1104

These numbers may increase as there is a small number of applications still at processing stage.

Grants for Replanting Land

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the Woodland Grant Scheme, and other grants offered by Forest Service, will include grants for replanting land previously used as woodland. (AQW 314/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Within the Forestry Grant Schemes, grant aid is available to woodland owners for replanting in existing woodland which will result in positive environmental benefits.

The current rates for replanting are £400 per hectare for conifers and £600 per hectare for broadleaves, paid as a single instalment when planting is completed.

Loop River

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when the Loop River and its tributaries (i) were last inspected; and (ii) will next be inspected; and what plans she has to increase the frequency of inspections, given the flooding that has occurred in the last 2 years. (AQW 315/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: (i) The Loop River was last inspected on 7 November 2007. The tributaries, Glenbrook River and the Merok Burn, were inspected on 15 November 2007. In all three cases, the required works identified were implemented immediately after the inspections.

(ii) Inlet grilles on the Loop River system are afforded highest priority and inspected at least weekly and when we are advised by the Met Office of imminent heavy rainfall. Annual inspection is due early November 2008. Rivers Agency has no plans to increase frequency of routine inspections on these watercourses, but is in receipt of a recently completed feasibility report on viability of potential works to reduce risk of flooding. Options are being considered for inclusion into the Agency's work programme.

Beekkeepers

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current state of the bee population; and what action she is taking to reverse the decline in bee numbers in recent years. (AQW 325/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: It is estimated that there are currently 1,000 beekeepers, maintaining about 4,000 hives here. There is no evidence to suggest that there is a decline in either the number of beekeepers or the number of managed hives in recent years. Bee numbers fall in Spring following Winter losses typically 10 – 15% and then come back up again in May and June.

My staff continue to assist beekeepers in the recognition and management of their hives through inspections and advice on site, as well as talks and demonstrations at conferences arranged by the industry and at local Beekeeping Association Meetings.

Dog Control Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she intends to shift the emphasis from destruction of dogs to penalties for irresponsible owners, in any future dog control legislation. (AQW 348/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The control of dogs, including dangerous dogs, is regulated under the Dogs (NI) Order 1983, as amended by the Dangerous Dogs (NI) Order 1991. The Order designates certain types of dogs of which it is an offence to be in possession, such as the pit bull terrier. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and may seize any dog that appears to be of a banned type. Such dogs are destroyed unless their owner can prove that they are not of a banned type. In addition, any dog which attacks people or livestock may be seized, and the dog may be destroyed at the order of a resident magistrate.

Under the legislation, owners or keepers may be prosecuted for having a dog of a banned type, or if their dog has attacked people or livestock. There are also a number of other offences regarding responsible ownership, such as keeping a dog without a licence or allowing a dog to stray.

However, I am currently reviewing the effectiveness of the legislation to deal fully with irresponsible owners.

During recent discussions with stakeholders and interested groups, I have heard conflicting views about the effectiveness of legislating for specific breeds or types of dogs rather than focusing on responsible dog

ownership. This is one of the issues that I am currently considering as part of my wide ranging Review.

While I hope to complete my Review in the coming months, I do not want to pre-empt its outcome at this stage.

Animal Welfare

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she will introduce animal welfare legislation. (AQW 349/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I indicated in a previous written answer on this issue on 14 March 2008, the Department consulted on proposals for new animal welfare legislation in late 2006 and, as this exercise was carried out under a different administration, I wanted to take time to fully consider the responses received.

Following my initial consideration of the comments, I have been meeting a number of key stakeholders who provided comments. This has enabled me to hear their concerns at first hand. Arrangements are also in hand for my officials to meet other stakeholders.

I welcome the outline animal welfare legislative proposals which were published by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) in Dublin. I have asked my officials to discuss these proposals in detail when they meet their counterparts in DAFF in October, as I believe that it is important that animal welfare legislation in both jurisdictions is broadly compatible.

The animal welfare proposals being brought forward in the South and the primary animal welfare legislation already in place in Britain will inform my policy review and enable robust animal welfare legislation to be brought forward here.

Animal Welfare

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what organisations responded to the consultation on draft legislation on animal welfare in 2006; and why their submissions have not been made publicly available. (AQW 350/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department received 91 responses to its 2006 consultation on proposals for new animal welfare legislation which issued in 2006. This included 46 responses from organisations and 45 from interested individuals, including several who elected to remain anonymous. A list of the organisations which responded is provided in Table 1.

As I indicated in a previous written answer on this issue on 14 March 2008, I am currently considering the responses to the 2006 consultation. I have also met a number of stakeholders to hear their concerns at first hand.

Once I have fully considered the issues, taking into account the comments received, and have decided what new legislation is needed, it is my intention to release a summary of the responses to the 2006 consultation exercise.

TABLE 1. LIST OF THE ORGANISATIONS THAT RESPONDED TO 2006 CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS FOR NEW ANIMAL WELFARE LEGISLATION

Animal Ethics Advisory Group
Animal Protection Agency
Animal Welfare Federation Northern Ireland
Anti-docking Alliance
Antrim and Down Springer Spaniel Club
Animals Need a Voice in Legislation Ireland (ANVIL)
Armagh City and District Council
ASSISI Animal Sanctuary
Ballymena Animal Welfare Society
British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC NI)
Birds First UK
British PSychological Society
British Wool Marketing Board
Captive Animals Protection Society
Channelview Boarding Kennels and Cattery
Council of Docked Breeds
Countryside Alliance Ireland
Craigavon Borough Council
Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary / Cats Protection
Down District Council
Dungannon and South Tyrone Council – Environmental Health Department
Fermanagh District Council
Glenlark Nature Reserve
Greyhound Action
Greyhound Welfare NI
Hunting Association of NI
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)
International League for the Protection of Horses (ILPH)
Irish Coursing Club (ICC)
League Against Cruel Sports (LACS)

New Life Parrot Rescue & Helpline Service
Newry and Mourne District Council
Newtownabbey Animal Welfare Support Group
Northern Ireland Badger Group
Northern Ireland Court Service
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission
Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association
Pet Care Trust
Seafish Technology and Training
Society of Greyhound Veterinarians
The Kennel Club
Ulster Farmers' Union
Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA)
Vegetarian Economy and Green Agriculture (VEGA)
Waterside Action Group
Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster

Entry of Animals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what checks are in place in relation to the entry of animals to prevent the spread of disease. (AQW 351/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The checks are:

- 1) In relation to animals directly imported from or through Britain.

Importers of animals originating in Britain must apply for a specific licence in advance. All animals must come through the port of Larne where my Department's Veterinary Service Portal staff will carry out documentary checks on the veterinary certification and may carry out further physical and destination checks on a risk basis.

- 2) In relation to animals imported from EU countries

Those that enter the North direct from other EU countries are notified to us through the TRACES system which records movements on an EU wide basis. Importers are also required to present their paperwork to their local Divisional Veterinary Office as soon as possible after importation for checking. We may carry out physical and destination checks depending on the risk.

Currently, all ruminants (includes cattle, sheep, goats and camelids) being imported from Britain and

EU member states other than the South are being restricted at destination and are subject to specific post import testing for bluetongue.

My Department has issued regular publicity on this matter and information has gone out to the industry highlighting the risk of importation. This is available on my Department's Internet site.

Derelict Bridge

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when her Department will remove the derelict bridge across the Six Mile Water River in Grangers Mill, Muckamore. (AQW 360/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD does not own the bridge across the Six Mile Water River. Rivers Agency's powers to remove or to direct the removal of the bridge under the Drainage (NI) Order 1973 are limited.

Rivers Agency will investigate flood flow levels and the need to remove the bridge, if removal is deemed necessary. It will investigate ownership as any action to do so would have to be taken by the owners, possibly after consultation with the NI Environment Agency in relation to any built heritage value.

Projects in Upper Bann

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what projects her Department delivered in the Upper Bann constituency in 2007-08; and what projects have commenced, or are due to commence, in 2008-09. (AQW 362/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table lists the projects delivered in the Upper Bann constituency in 2007-2008 and the projects that have commenced in 2008. The Rural Development Programme will also offer considerable opportunities for the Upper Bann constituency, and throughout the North, during 2008-09 and beyond. My Department is currently in the process of assessing the various rural development strategies produced by local action groups which will determine funding priorities. As applications for funding can only be accepted once this process has been completed, I am unable to provide details of what projects will be delivered at this time.

PROJECTS DELIVERED IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY BETWEEN 1 APRIL 2007 AND 31 MARCH 2008.

Name of Project	Brief description of Project
Projects delivered under the Rural Development Programme	
Maghera Traditions Group Workshop Weekends	Provision of traditional music, dance and song workshops over a weekend, catering for all levels of ability and based in various locations in the Maghera area.
Development & Marketing of Christian Heritage	Project to provide signage, interpretation and to enhance a number of Christian Heritage and Pre-Christian Sites along the south shore of Lough Neagh.
Pressbreak	Funding for the purchase of a 'Pressbreak' to enable more efficiency in a competitive engineering market.
Color Foto Processing	Funding for equipment to allow on site processing, printing and packaging of products.
Foymore Lodge Shooting School	Purpose-built centre, located on a small-holding in the Lough Neagh wetlands area. It will offer a range of clay pigeon shooting activities (together with a range of clay pigeon shooting equipment), safety tuition and coaching.
Hillbrook Spring Water Project	Expansion and development of business from test marketing plant to full scale production bottling water from source from Borewell.
Molloys Moving Forward	Funding Molloy Engineering, a family run business, established 25 years, to move forward with a new range of approved builders trestles to comply with new H & S regulations.
Upgrade & Development of Shop Facilities	Upgrade and modernisation of Shop which will include purchase of an Electronic Point Of Sale and installation of new shelving & displays
Bleary Farmers Hall Car Park & Boundary Fence	Removal of hedge and erection of fence along the roadside to improve visibility when leaving the car park. Removal of old toilet block and extend existing car park to provide additional car parking and prevent cars parking on the road at a dangerous bend.
Stonewall	The project focuses on the development of the ROI as an export market for Orla Havlin Designs and involves a number of component parts as follows; Product Development, Market Research and Sales prospecting, Development of Market Specific Promotional Materials, Development of Retail and Direct Sales, and investment in Capital equipment.
Master McGrath Maze	Developing a unique contemporary maze at Tannaghmore Gardens.
Greenan Glass Recycling	The purchase of a glass crusher to crush glass to dust for use in blasting and asphalt road and line coverings.
Log Recycling	A versatile and quick response log clearing operation which recycles logs and sells them bagged to the retail trade

Name of Project	Brief description of Project
Projects delivered under the Rural Development Programme	
Reducing Risks / Cutting Costs – Programme Implementation	Provision of training to small rural businesses on all aspects of risk management within the workplace and development of risk assessment procedure for reducing identified risks.
Biodiesel optimisation	Plant optimisations and installation of quality assurance laboratory to test raw material and end product diesel.
Action 2 Reducing Risks Cutting Costs Operational Project	Northern Ireland Leader Network wide project assisting micro businesses to address issues regarding insurance costs.
Lough Neagh club boat	Purchase a small club boat to assist with sailing races, events, mark maintenance and training.
Kinnegoe lifeboat replacement	Replacement of lifeboat with a higher specification craft. The boat will provide a rapid response platform for persons in distress and render assistance in the most practical way and also increase safety for crew.
Disabled Boat	Purchase of a new disabled friendly training boat suitable for providing innovative training to disabled people.
Wetland Habitat work on Lough Beg	Project to rehabilitate lowland wet grassland and associated habitats at Portmore Lough for the benefit of breeding waders, wintering waterfowl and the wider biodiversity at the site.
Portmore Lough Wetland Restoration	Project to enhance the biodiversity within Portmore Lough and the surrounding Lough Neagh network of wetlands through removing 8.7 ha of scrub at RSPB's Portmore Lough reserve.
Projects delivered by the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)	
Further and Higher Education Programmes	FE and HE programmes provided for those wishing to pursue a career in the agri-food industry are delivered at the CAFRE Campuses of Greenmount, Loughry and Enniskillen. Courses are open to those who meet the required entry criteria from across the North.
Industry training programme	Training courses for those working in the agri-food industry are delivered locally across the North and at the CAFRE Campuses of Greenmount, Enniskillen and Loughry. Training programmes delivered within the Upper Bann Constituency in 07/08 include: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification Challenge; • Cereal Challenge; • Commercial horticulture short courses; • Agri-environment training courses.

Name of Project	Brief description of Project
Projects delivered under the Rural Development Programme	
Knowledge and Technology Transfer programme	This programme aims to equip those in the agri-food industry with the knowledge, skills and experience to adopt appropriate technologies and systems within their businesses. CAFRE Technologists and Development Advisers work with the industry to encourage the adoption of the technology or system within their businesses. This is achieved through training courses, normally delivered throughout the North, Demonstration events on the College Farm/local farms or Food Processing Units and through mentoring.
Benchmarking programme	This programme involves the collection of physical and financial data from farmers and growers, the analysis of this data by CAFRE Business Technologists and comparison with similar farm businesses. Through this programme the strengths and weaknesses of farm business performance can be identified and actions to improve performance implemented. This programme is available to farmers and growers across the North.
Veterinary Projects	
Brucellosis Initiative	The Brucellosis Initiative extends to all of Northern Ireland but 2 of the farmers' meetings held in the spring of 2007 were held in the areas of Armagh and Newry. The invitation to attend either would have been open to constituents of the Upper Bann region. Similarly, the brucellosis farmers' liaison groups that are also part of the Initiative, are open to those same constituents who would want to be involved.

PROJECTS COMMENCED IN THE UPPER BANN CONSTITUENCY IN 2008 TO DATE.

Name of Project	Brief description of Project	Date of Commencement
Projects delivered by Rivers Agency		
Belmont Stream Scheme	Drainage Infrastructure Improvement Scheme	March 2008 and on-going. Expected completion in October 2008.

Child Poverty

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to tackle child poverty in rural areas. (AQW 365/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Tackling child poverty is a cross cutting issue for all departments, as recognised by the OFMdfM Committee Inquiry into Child Poverty. I am playing my part in addressing this issue through

my membership of the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People.

Child Poverty in the rural context is often compounded by other issues such as lack of access to services such as transport or childcare. In order to address this I commissioned a report into Rural Childcare that has made recommendations to a number of government departments. I am taking forward the recommendations made to DARD in the form of a Rural Childcare Programme.

This programme will be funded from the £10 million I secured in the Programme for Government to address poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. Priorities for action are being developed to support projects addressing poverty and exclusion and I am hopeful that these actions will contribute towards tackling child poverty in rural areas.

The 2007 - 13 Rural Development Programme will also provide opportunities to tackle poverty in rural areas. In particular, Axis 3 of this programme will direct 5% of its budget towards projects supporting children and young people.

Expenditure Targets for European Funding Programmes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is her Department's projected underspend of European project money for 2008/09; how this compares to the year 2007/08; and to detail those programmes which are unlikely to meet their spend commitments. (AQW 375/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Expenditure targets for European funding Programmes are set on a calendar year basis.

The Department do not currently project any underspend of European Project money for 2008 or 2009.

In 2007 the Department had an underspend of £43,000 in the INTERREG Programme however this was utilised by other Measures within the Programme and no loss of EU receipts occurred as a result.

Renewing Communities Programme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to fund isolated Protestant groups, such as churches and the Loyal Orders, which operate in rural areas. (AQW 377/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Renewing Communities Programme launched in December 2006 and my Department received funding from the Department of

Social Development to run a pilot scheme to support and help isolated protestant communities in four rural areas of the north. The programme objective was to help the groups develop capacity, increase confidence, access support and set up four rural information hubs. It is due to end in January 2009 and in advance of that date my officials have commissioned a review of the scheme and the outcome of the review will help inform, providing that future funding is available the shape and scope of any new programme.

My department is also in the process of rolling out the new Rural Development Programme and under axis 3 there are opportunities for community groups to avail of funding under some of the six measures.

Dairy Products

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what extra steps she is taking to promote Northern Ireland dairy products given a more favourable exchange rate. (AQW 402/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The European Commission State Aid rules place severe constraints on the use of Government funds for the promotion of local agri-food products both here and across the EU.

In relation to the marketing of local produce, my Department administers the Regional Food Programme. This is designed to promote quality local produce, to develop profitable and sustainable markets here, in the South and in Britain and to increase co-operation and communication between all sectors of the agri-food industry.

Under this programme, the Dairy Council, acting on behalf of the dairy industry, has received significant financial support. In 2007/08 it was awarded £162,500 for generic promotional and market research activities here and in Britain. This research has afforded local dairy companies a greater understanding of trends and developments in these markets, as well as providing data to support product innovation. This funding also supported the Dairy Council's presence at trade and consumer fairs. I am pleased to advise that the Dairy Council has recently been awarded a further £64,370, under the Regional Food Programme, to undertake similar activities during the 2008/09 year.

I am also pleased that recently the Dairy Council benefitted from EU support of circa £200,000 for a marketing campaign entitled "Morning Milk". This campaign will run in conjunction with the Danish Milk Board.

Food technologists at CAFRE continue to work with a wide range of processing businesses in

the dairy sector to identify and take advantage of niche and other market opportunities through the development of new products. Specialist training is also provided to those engaged in the development of value added products.

The dairy industry makes an important contribution to the agri-food industry. I will continue to do what I can, working within EU legislation, to support and encourage the dairy industry in their efforts to exploit new business opportunities, irrespective of the economic climate.

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress her Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 431/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is making good progress in delivering its Programme for Government (PfG) and Public Service Agreement (PSA) commitments.

I outline below the main achievements to date in respect of each of the 3 PSAs in which DARD is in the lead and the four further commitments included in PfG.

PSA 4 – SUPPORT RURAL BUSINESSES

- Under Axis 1 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13, the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme is open and letters of offer are being issued. Work is progressing to launch the remaining Axis 1 schemes later this year, including the Farm Modernisation scheme.
- A Better Regulation Review, led by an independent panel and supported by officials, was set up by DARD and DoE in late 2007 with the objective of cutting the administrative burden (red tape) in the agri-food sector by 25% by 2013 (15% by 2011). The Review is expected to report at the end of November this year and will:
 - establish an estimate of the administrative burden put on farmers and agri-business by DARD and DoE regulations ;
 - provide a baseline against which progress on the PSA indicator can be measured;
 - recommend strategies on how the burden may be reduced;
 - recommend structures and processes for implementation.
- Agreement of an All-island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy by March 2009 is on track for

achievement. A draft Strategy was noted at the North South Ministerial Council Agriculture Sectoral Meeting on 9 November 2007 and was issued for formal consultation with key stakeholders in the North on 13 March 2008. Responses to the consultation were very supportive of the Strategy. The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food in Dublin also circulated the draft Strategy to its key stakeholders and the Irish Farmers Association added its support. I hope to agree the Strategy with my Ministerial colleagues at the next North South Ministerial Council Meeting.

- The new NI Countryside Management Scheme was launched on 8 June 2008 and at closure of the first application period on 29 August 2008 over 4,500 applications had been received.
- The development process for Special Environmental Projects, an integral part of the NICMS, has commenced.
- The new Organic Farming Scheme was opened to applications on 1 September 2008 (closing date 31 October 2008).
- At July an additional 115.5 hectares of agricultural land and non-agricultural land had been converted to forest and woodland.
- The number of inspected farm businesses complying with environmental cross-compliance standards is now 89.79% against a target of 90% by 2011.

PSA 17 - HELP RURAL COMMUNITIES IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THEIR AREAS

- Good progress is being made in ensuring, by 2013, 1,000 people will benefit from ICT initiatives, 2,000 people will benefit from improved mobility and 5,000 people will benefit from cultural and social-economic initiatives. These actions are being delivered by a combination of Axis 3 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13, Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion schemes and the Interreg IV 2007-13 programme. Local area strategies produced by the Councils and Local Action Groups have highlighted areas which will contribute towards the realisation of these benefits.
- In addition, an Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion policy framework is nearing completion, which will also help towards a raft of social benefits. Under Interreg IV, the Department has been working closely with the Special EU Programmes Body to agree the Rural Sub Theme of the programme, and it is intended to open calls for applications later this year.
- The Executive agreed initial proposals to develop the Rural Champion initiative and enhance the rural proofing process in April 2008. A new Interdepart-

mental Committee on Rural Policy, which I chair, and which met for the first time on 7 August, has been established to help take forward this work and to ensure rural issues are routinely considered by all Departments.

- Following preconsultation with stakeholders, proposals for Rural Champion and enhancement of the rural proofing process issued for public consultation from 13 August 2008 to 5 November 2008. After the consultation it is intended to present the final roles of Rural Champion and proposals for enhancement of rural proofing to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and Executive by the end of 2008.
- The Executive also agreed in April 2008 for me to lead development of a Rural White Paper. A paper is being produced which will outline the proposed content and process for full development of the Rural White Paper during 2009. The Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy will assist in development of the Rural White Paper and a stakeholder advisory group is currently being established. It is intended to present a paper to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and Executive by the end of 2008.

PSA 23 - MANAGING THE RISK OF FLOODING FROM RIVERS AND THE SEA

- One of the key indicators for the Rivers Agency in achieving this PSA target is the establishment of an agreed policy framework. The policy framework was approved by First and deputy First Minister in July 2008.
- An exercise to refine the number of properties at risk from base flood maps was completed in July 2008.
- A further key indicator for the Agency involved the completion of a condition assessment of flood defence infrastructure, namely urban flood defences. The asset management plan for sea defences has been completed.

PfG Commitments

Bring forward a £10.0m package to combat rural social exclusion and poverty

- A high level Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion policy framework which sets out the vision and objectives for this work is nearing completion. The Framework will look at actions to address rural need, for example fuel poverty and childcare.

Enable up to 4,700 farmers to comply with the Nitrates Directive by 2009

- Following my securing budget assurances in June 2007, significant progress has been made. Out of 4,390 applications which remain live, 4,233 had

been issued approval at 9th September. The bulk of approvals were issued before May this year. The amount of storage completed has not been aided by two wet summers, although there has been a significant expansion of work on the ground this year. 1,644 claims had been received at 9th September.

Improve the quality of life in rural areas by investing £100m in local development strategies by 2013

- This commitment is being delivered by Axis 3 and Axis 4 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13. Council and Local Action Group delivery structures have been established and are working towards calls for applications before the end of the year.

Provide a network of one-stop shops to improve access to DARD services by 2011

- An extensive pre-consultation exercise on the proposal to roll out the DARD Direct service delivery model across NI took place with key stakeholder groups, Section 75 and equality groups and DARD Staff. The EQIA consultation document for the roll out of DARD Direct was developed and issued for public consultation. The closing date for comments on the EQIA was 5 September 2008 and DARD officials are currently collating the responses received.
- Unified administration teams have been established and are being embedded at 5 interim office locations (Dungannon, Omagh, Ballymena, Coleraine and Newry). These are in addition to the DARD Direct office already operational at Inishkeen House, Enniskillen.

Future of Departmental Offices at Killane Road, Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has in relation to the future of departmental offices at Killane Road, Limavady. (AQW 587/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The public consultation phase of the EQIA on the proposed model for the roll-out of DARD Direct has recently been completed. My officials are currently preparing a final EQIA report which includes the findings of this consultation exercise and recommendations. No decisions on the final number and locations of DARD Direct offices will be taken until after this report has been fully considered.

Volumes of Fresh Milk Sold

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what volume of fresh milk was sold to other parts of the United Kingdom in the first 2 weeks of September 2008. (AQW 665/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department does not routinely collect the information requested. This information would be collected during a time of disease outbreak; however, the period referred to was not affected by disease outbreak.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

FIM World Championship Trials 2009

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of funding his Department will be providing for the 2009 FIM World Championship Trials. (AQW 307/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has not received any correspondence from the organisers of the FIM World Championship Trials seeking funding for their 2009 event.

Decisions about funding for motorsport events such as the FIM World Championship Trials are a matter, in the first instance, for the governing bodies of motorsport as represented by the 2x4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group Limited.

As part of the Review of Public Administration, officials from my Department are working closely with colleagues in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to progress the anticipated transfer of events budget and functions by April 2009. Following the anticipated transfer, funding may be available for specific events from the NITB.

Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement Commitments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what progress his Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 432/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL, as a Department and through its Arms Length Bodies, continues to make good progress

towards delivering its commitments as outlined in the Programme for Government and Public Service Agreements.

To date in Year 1 of the Programme for Government, achievements include:

- The increased settlement to Arts Council following the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 is being passed-on directly to arts providers in the form of increased programme funding. This will contribute directly to Departmental targets for increased participation and attendance at arts and cultural events.
- DCAL has transferred the delivery of the Community Festivals Fund to local councils and this will help to increase attendance at and participation in events.
- In relation to the investment of £110m in our sports facilities by 2011, £1.5m has been invested so far. Although progress has been slow, this is to be expected in the early stages of the roll out of major capital programmes. A number of programmes are underway and others will be re-opened or introduced to ensure that this target will be met. They include the Elite Facilities Capital Programme, Building Sport Programme and Places for Sport: Surfaces. Other programmes are under consideration.
- In relation to halting the decline of adult participation in sport and physical recreation, the source of data for measurement of this target is the Continuous Household Survey (CHS). CHS 2007/08 data will not be available until Autumn 2008. Progress against this target will depend on the implementation of the draft Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation, which has yet to receive Executive approval.
- The baseline position of the target to have 125,000 children participating in sport and physical recreation is already being exceeded. Source of data is Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, a survey of 11-16 year olds in Northern Ireland. The survey is conducted every three years – 2003, 2007, 2010 (provisional). The participation rate is taken from the survey and multiplied by the number of 11-16 year olds in the population to estimate the number of 11-16 year olds who participate in sport. While the target is currently being exceeded, it must be borne in mind that the number of 11-16 year olds is projected to fall between now and 2011. Progress against this target will depend on the implementation of the draft Strategy for Sport & Physical Recreation, which has yet to receive Executive approval.
- A number of programmes are underway and others will be re-opened or introduced to ensure that by 2011 Northern Ireland will have a minimum of 10

- new or upgraded facilities to support player/athlete development in Olympic and Paralympics sports and which will be available for community and school use. The programmes include the Elite Facilities Capital Programme, Building Sport Programme and Places for Sport: Surfaces. Other Programmes are under consideration. In addition the Big Lottery Fund can be accessed and projects funded through this scheme may also contribute to the target.
- Northern Ireland's 2012 Leadership Group for the Olympics in 2012 has been established and the first meeting was held on 26 June 2008.
 - The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG)'s Nations & Regions Co-ordination Group Meetings was attended and respective work was progressed. Six-month Progress Reports co-ordinated and completed for LOCOG.
 - A DCAL-led 2012 Communications Forum Group was set up with members of the key theme organisations to support the delivery of the targets set out in the NI Strategy for the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games by using a wide range of communication tools to deliver consistent key messages.
 - A draft Communications Strategy was drawn up to provide the framework enabling DCAL and the key partner organisations to inform public opinion in support of the London 2012 Games.
 - Media launches held for the successful Northern Ireland venues (26 Olympic & 8 Paralympic venues) included in LOCOG's Pre-Games Training Camp (PGTC) Guide launched during the Beijing Games. DCAL facilitated seminars and consultations with venue-owners and sporting bodies respectively.
 - DCAL part-funded the production of Northern Ireland marketing materials for distribution at the Beijing Games. Sport Northern Ireland and DCAL presence at the Beijing Games along with a research group and team in the GB training camp in Macau.
 - National Museums Northern Ireland have made good progress towards achieving 585,000 visitors by 2009 and have achieved 163,000 visitors to the sites in the first 3 months of the year. They are on track to achieve this objective.
 - National Museums Northern Ireland are currently developing a digitisation strategy which will be ready by March 2009. The strategy will describe the scope and range of the collections that can or should be digitised taking account of legal and copyright issues. In the interim digitisation of the more popular collections i.e. fine art and glass photographic plates is proceeding and will be made available when the new website is developed in 2009.
 - To date 8000 items from the more popular collections have been digitised by National Museums Northern Ireland.
 - National Museums Northern Ireland have agreed a target of 110,000 organised educational visits by 2009. In the first three months of the Programme for Government they have achieved 61,000 organised educational visits. They are on track to achieve and possibly over achieve on this objective.
 - Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 received Royal Assent on 17 June 2008. Some provisions will be commenced on 1 October 2008.
 - Recruitment of members of the Board of the Library Authority is underway, with interviews completed for the post of Chairperson.
 - The new IT provider for the finance and corporate services of the Library Authority has been selected, and work has begun on design and implementation of the systems.
 - The Western Education and Library Board has extended opening hours with more late evenings and Saturday opening.
 - Most Education and Library Boards are on target to meet the £2 per head stock target.
 - Public Libraries continue to provide free access to digital resources and the internet.
 - New Libraries at Grove and Bangor have been completed. Work started on site at Antrim New Library and Newtown Stewart Library.
 - The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) will produce at least 6 searchable databases, all accessible via a single portal by 2011. Two databases are to be produced by March 2009. These are ready for the website and DRD ISU have been sent a draft specification to prepare the web front end.
 - Since being established in September 2007, the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) for Architecture and the Built Environment has reviewed design aspects of several significant projects including one major public sector project sponsored by DCAL. This activity is largely 'demand-led' and it is expected that each year the majority of schemes reviewed by MAG will be significant projects selected by the Planning Service. MAG will continue to carry out design review of selected projects in both public and private sectors and plans to recruit expert advisors to assist it with design review.
 - To date, Waterways Ireland have kept 95% of the existing waterways and navigations open from April to October. A maintenance programme for navigations is in place that will ensure the target continues to be met in future years.

- The Salmon and Eel Management Plan objectives, will be achieved by 2011. Involved in this are the transfer of the functions of the Fishery Conservancy Board (FCB) into the Department by March 2009; submission of Eel Plans by December 2008; submission of inter-departmental focus area report on protection, restoration and enhancement of salmon habitat to NASCO by December 2008 and general reporting to NACSO on progress with strategy by April 2009. Currently the Department is on course to meet these targets. The Departments Atlantic Salmon Management Strategy for NI and the cross border Foyle and Carlingford catchments was approved by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) in June 2008. A report focusing on fisheries management strategy was well received and an ambitious programme of work to implement the overall strategy is underway. Eel Management Plans as required under EU regulation are nearing completion (due to be submitted in December 2008). Northern Ireland shall submit 3 river basin plans to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as part of the UK national submission. The North West plan is transboundary and is being developed with the Irish authorities.
- The DCAL capital programme is progressing as approved under the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI). The overall capital programme is managed and monitored by the DCAL Capital Programme Management Board. The programme is delivered for DCAL across six sectors (Arts, Libraries, Sport, Museums, Inland Waterways and Inland Fisheries, and PRONI) by the Department's Arms Length Bodies. Spend to Date : £8m.

Developments on key arts infrastructure projects

- Significant progress has been made in the delivery of the key arts infrastructure projects in Belfast and Londonderry. The organisations taking forward the developments have all maintained a full programme of activity during the construction phase of the projects by decanting to alternative premises and/or producing and touring work off-site. The developments on the key projects are detailed below:
- Lyric Players' Theatre: The old Lyric theatre has been demolished and Gilbert Ash NI Ltd has been appointed as the preferred contractor to build the new theatre. The Lyric and Contractor are working to agree a contract price for the construction project and hope to begin work on site in November 2008. The Lyric is running a full off-site production programme for the duration of the construction project.
- Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC): The design for the MAC is progressing well and the plans secured full planning permission in June 2008, in line with the project programme. The Stage 1 Tender Process for contractor selection is ongoing and the preferred contractor should be appointed towards the end of October 2008. The Old Museum Arts Centre has maintained a full production programme during the pre-construction phase of the project.
- Crescent Arts Centre: The Crescent Arts Centre has appointed Gilbert Ash NI Ltd as the preferred contractor for the construction phase and they began work on site in September 2008. The Crescent organisation decanted to temporary accommodation on the Ormeau Road and is offering a full programme of activity to the public for the duration of the construction works.
- The Ulster Hall: The Ulster Hall project has made significant progress on site and the construction work is due to be completed in January 2009.
- The Playhouse Theatre, Londonderry: The Playhouse project has made significant progress on site and the construction work is due to be completed early in 2009, i.e. January or February, dependant upon the outcome of an 'Extension of Time Request' by the Contractor. The Playhouse decanted to St Columb's Theatre, on Orchard Street adjacent to the City Walls, for the duration of the project and has maintained a full programme of activity for clients and the public.
- An Gaeláras: The An Gaeláras project in Londonderry has made significant progress on site and the construction work is scheduled for completion in March 2009. The design for the An Gaeláras building has been chosen as one of the Irish entries in the 11th Venice International Architecture Biennale 2008. An Gaeláras has continued to offer a full range of activity during the construction project.
- Waterside Theatre, Londonderry: Phase 1 of the Waterside Project, The Gateway Studio, is completed and was opened officially on 13 June 2008. Phase 2, the new Foyer, is due to be completed in October 2008. The Waterside Theatre delivered a full programme of activity during the Phase 1 construction.
- Nerve Centre, Londonderry: The purchase of the existing Nerve Centre building and the adjacent Youth Hostel building has been completed and work is ongoing to refurbish and develop these into usable space.
- Gasyard Development Trust, Londonderry: Project completed on programme and within budget.

Paralympic Athletes

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the total number; and (ii) location of sports facilities that will be used as training camps by Paralympic athletes training for the 2012 Olympic Games, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 546/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Eight of Northern Ireland's sports facilities are included in the Pre-Games Training Camp (PGTC) Guide for the 2012 Paralympic Games. Inclusion in the PGTC Guide does not guarantee that the venue will be selected by a National Paralympic Committee (NPC). Inclusion in the guide is the rubber stamp from the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) that the facilities are suitable. The Guide was circulated to NPC's during the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games.

The location of the eight venues broken down by parliamentary constituency, are as follows:-

Venue	Parliamentary Constituency
Antrim Forum Complex	South Antrim
Ballyholme Yacht Club	North Down
Bangor Castle Leisure Centre	North Down
Bangor Sportsplex	North Down
Mary Peters Athletics Track	Belfast South
University of Ulster at Jordanstown	East Antrim
Carrickfergus Sailing Club	East Antrim
Queen's Sport, Queen's University Belfast	Belfast South

EDUCATION

Millisle Primary School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education when repair work will start on Millisle Primary School, particularly the installation of new windows. (AQW 107/09)

The Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt dom go gcuirfear tús le hobair ag Millisle Primary School chun áiseanna leithris nua a sholáthar i mí Dheireadh Fómhair. Tá soláthar fuinneog nua ag an chéim pleanála faoi láthair agus tá sé beartaithe go mbeidh

an obair seo críochnaithe faoi dheireadh na bliana airgeadais.

I have been informed by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board that work will commence at Millisle Primary School to provide new toilet facilities in October. The provision of new windows is currently at the planning stage and it is envisaged this work will be complete by the end of the financial year.

Works at Movilla High School

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to provide an outline of the works to be done to Movilla High School; and to give an estimated commencement and completion date for these works. (AQW 171/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt dom go bhfuil obair ag an chéim pleanála chun na háiseanna eacnamaíochta baile a fheabhsú ag an scoil. Cuirfear tús leis an obair i dtrátha dheireadh na bliana airgeadais seo agus mairfidh an obair thart ar 8 seachtain sula mbeidh sí críochnaithe.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board that work is in the planning stage to upgrade the home economics facilities at the school. The work will commence towards the end of this financial year and will take approximately 8 weeks to complete.

Early Retirement Enhanced Packages

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Education how many teachers have taken early retirement enhanced packages in the (i) controlled sector; (ii) maintained sector; (iii) integrated sector; (iv) Irish medium sector; (v) independent sector, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 223/09)

The Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon na múinteoirí atá ag fáil pinsin bhreisithe agus cnapshuime faoin Scéim Cúitimh um Luathscor i ngach bliain airgeadais le 5 bhliana airgeadais anuas:

The number of teachers receiving enhanced pension and lump sum under the Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme in each of the last 5 financial years is as follows:

Management Type	No of teachers receiving additional service credit as part of compensation for premature retirement					
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09 (to 31.08.08)
Controlled	119	157	254	222	210	4
Maintained Ccms/ Other Maintained	181	179	254	251	217	0
Controlled Integrated/ Grant Maintained Integrated	2	5	4	5	10	0
Irish Medium	0	1	0	2	3	0
Voluntary Grammar Sector	52	31	69	67	117	0
Total	354	373	581	547	557	4

Classroom Assistants

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education if (i) a timetable for the payment of arrears to classroom assistants has been established by Education and Library Boards; and (ii) for an update in the progress made in relation to these payments. (AQW 256/09)

The Minister of Education: The Boards have paid all of the “one-off” compensatory payments to those classroom assistants who returned their ‘Variation of Contract Form’ following the Collective Agreement reached on 30 November 2007.

Is próiseas níos casta é íocaíocht riaráistí i leith na bpostmheastóireachtaí a siardhátaíodh go dtí 1995 agus bíonn tráthúlacht na n-íocaíochtaí ag brath ar chomhaontú startha gairme agus jabthuiriscí dhaoine aonair.

Payment of arrears in respect of the job evaluations backdated to 1995 is a more complex process and the timing of the payments depends on the agreement of individual career histories and job descriptions. It is not possible to detail when individuals will receive arrears as this will depend on when the documentation is signed off and returned to the individual Boards. However, all Boards are committed to working to a timetable of calculating and paying arrears by 31 March 2009 for all classroom assistants who are entitled to them.

Proposed Closures

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed (i) closure of St Aloysius’ High School, Cushendall; and (ii) amalgamation of St Comgall’s College, Larne, and St MacNissis, Garron Tower. (AQW 339/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an Roinn ag breathnú togra forbartha faoi láthair ó na hÍontaobhaithe agus ó Chomhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil maidir le cónascadh St Aloysius’ High School, St Comgall’s College agus St MacNissi’s College, Garron Tower ar láithreán Garron Tower.

The Department is currently considering a development proposal from the Trustees and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools for the amalgamation of St Aloysius’ High School, St Comgall’s College and St MacNissi’s College, Garron Tower on the Garron Tower site. The department’s assessment includes an examination of the options considered and the issues raised during the consultation exercise. I will make a decision on the proposal as soon as possible.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the weekly cost per pupil of the Middletown Autism project when it is fully implemented; (ii) what that cost would be when extrapolated for the 8,500 people on the Autistic Spectrum in Ireland; and (iii) whether she has consulted the Children’s Commissioner or the Equality Commission in relation to the equality agenda. (AQW 353/09)

The Minister of Education: The estimated weekly staffing costs for educational support for a child undergoing a placement of up to five weeks period, in the Learning Support Centre, when the Middletown Autism project is fully implemented, is approximately £912. There will be other associated costs for overheads, but these cannot be attributed accurately at this stage.

The Middletown Centre for Autism will offer a range of services, only one of which will be the specialist educational assessment of children with autism. This service is not targeted at all children with autism in Ireland, but rather for those whose existing provision could be better tailored to meet their specific needs and who are causing particular challenges to their educational setting. For the majority of children, their special educational needs will continue to be met by schools and Education and Library Boards (ELBs) with the associated costs met in the normal way through school and ELB budgets. An extrapolation

for all children with autism of the estimated costs for assessment of those attending the Centre is therefore not relevant.

Maidir le comhairliúchán le Coimisinéir na bPáistí, ba mhaith liom aird an Chomhalta a dhíriú ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar a cheist AQW 5008/08 a foilsíodh sa tuairisc oifigiúil ar 4ú Aibreán 2008. Ní dheachaigh mo Roinn i gcomhairle leis an Choimisiún Comhionannais i ndáil le hIonad Choillidh Chanannáin.

With regard to consultation with the Children's Commissioner, I have met with the Children's Commissioner and the Equality Commission where special needs and equality issues have been to the fore of our discussion. I am fully committed to the equality agenda and am particularly keen to ensure that all children, and especially those with special educational needs, fully realise their individual potential. The vision of the Department of Education is 'to ensure that every learner fulfils his or her full potential'. Considerations of equality are therefore central to everything that the Department does in relation to children and young people affected by educational disadvantage.

Middletown Autism Project

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education if (i) the Middletown Autism project buildings meet Regulation Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) standards; and (ii) the recognition has been or will be applied for; and if not, how the physical provisions of the site will be classified. (AQW 355/09)

The Minister of Education: Members of the Middletown Building Sub-group, established by officials from the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Science, began a series of meeting with the Eastern Health and Social Services Board's Registration and Inspection Unit, the predecessor to the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA), in 2002. These meetings culminated in an assessment report on the proposals for the residential accommodation at Middletown by RIU in January 2003. Subsequent to that report, ongoing contact has been made with RQIA since 2006 and officials have visited the Centre and offered advice to the Integrated Design Team on the refurbishment proposals.

The Building Sub-group members are cognisant of the need to ensure fully compliant standards are in place to meet the needs of this vulnerable group of children.

Tuigeann baill foirne ón Ionad go gcaithfidh siad aighneacht fhoirmiúil a dhéanamh chuig RQIA le haghaidh gnéithe cónaithe an tsoláthair a chlárú

agus bhí ball sinsearach foirne i dteagmháil le RQIA cheana féin le fáil amach faoin phróiseas maidir le hiarratais agus maidir leis na caighdeáin a éilítear le haghaidh chlárú RQIA.

Personnel from the Centre are aware that they must make a formal submission to RQIA for registration of the residential elements of the provision and a senior staff member has already been in contact with RQIA to establish the application process and the standards required for RQIA registration. The classification of the residential aspects of Centre will be formally classified as part of the application for registration.

Middletown Autism Project

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education if the Middletown Autism project will be operated on the basis of a private boarding school; and if so, (i) how many children will be resident in each intake; (ii) what will the duration be of each intake; (iii) how many courses are planned each year; and (iv) if each intake will be continuous or operated on a weekday basis only. (AQW 357/09)

The Minister of Education:

The Middletown Centre for Autism is not a school, but it is anticipated that for the purposes of the Centre's residential accommodation the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority will regard the management of that accommodation as akin to that of a boarding school.

There will be a maximum of 20 children resident in each intake for the learning support service. In addition, there will be a maximum of 4 children, who may be accompanied by parents, resident in separate living space.

The 20 children resident in the accommodation blocks will stay for a period of approximately 5 weeks. The 2-4 children staying with their parents will attend the Centre for a comprehensive 2 day assessment.

The Centre is not planning to run "courses" for children. The residential stages of approximately 5 weeks will be for multi-disciplinary, educational assessments of the particular special educational needs of children with autism.

It is envisaged that two cohorts of 20 referrals will be dealt with concurrently by two learning support teams. In the course of each 5 week cycle, one team will work with 20 referrals in residential placement and the other team will be on field work – 2 weeks on pre-planned consultation visits, 2 weeks on post placement support visits and 1 week on preparatory work in connection with the next cohort of referrals.

It is expected that the Learning Support Service will develop its capacity to 140 placements per year, providing for a maximum of 20 children for each of 7 cohorts.

Beidh gach áit curtha in oiriúint do shainriachtanais an pháiste. D'fhéadfaí go mbeidh roinnt páistí ann ar bhonn laethúil, bunaithe ar a riachtanais mheasúnaithe, agus d'fhéadfaí go mbeidh cuid eile acu ina gcónaí ann de réir na hoíche nó ar bhonn seachtainiúil.

Each intake will be tailored to the specific needs of the child. Some children may operate on a daily basis, based on their assessed needs, while some may be resident on a nightly or weekly basis.

Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education what arrangements she has made with the (i) Health and Social Care Trusts; and (ii) Health and Social Services Boards, in relation to emergency and other health services for those who will attend residential courses at the Middletown Centre of Excellence for Autism; and how the cost of these services will be met and by whom. (AQW 359/09)

The Minister of Education: The Centre will employ a specialist member of staff to provide first line medical and nursing care. Management of the Centre have already been in discussion with local health and social services authorities and it the intention to enter into an agreement with local GP services to provide initial and routine emergency services.

Díolfaidh an tionscadal as aon chostais dhíreacha a bhaineann le baill foirne atá fostaithe ag an Ionad. Ní bheidh an tIonad freagrach as gnáthsheirbhísí éigeandála agus sláinte a sholáthraítear do pháistí sa cheantar.

Any direct costs of staff employed by the Centre will be met by the project. The Centre will not be responsible for normal emergency and health services provided for children in the area.

It should be stressed that the Middletown Centre for Autism is currently developing criteria for referral of children. The Centre will not take referrals of children whose medical needs are so significant or so complex that they cannot be met by local services, north and south.

Extended Schools Funding

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how much money has been offered to each school in the

Upper Bann constituency under Extended Schools funding for 2008/09; compared to funding allocated to each school for 2007/08. (AQW 376/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá na sonraí a iarradh leagtha amach sa tábla thíos.

The details requested are set out in the table below.

In light of the very positive indications given by the Finance Minister to the Assembly on June Monitoring about the importance of the Extended Schools programme and the potential to meet the bid for £5m re-submitted in the September monitoring round I had asked officials to put in place arrangements to ensure that additional allocations were made in July for school planning and continuity of the programme.

School Ref. number	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5116189	Millington Nursery School	Upper Bann	9,545	1,472
5136217	St John The Baptist Nursery	Upper Bann	9,430	1,461
5136631	Drumnamoe Nursery School	Upper Bann	8,300	1,270
5010992	Lurgan Model PS	Upper Bann	22,971	22,885
5011127	Carrick PS	Upper Bann	31,079	30,849
5011129	Hart Memorial PS	Upper Bann	28,520	28,261
5011190	Tullygally PS	Upper Bann	20,729	19,694
5011596	Craigavon PS	Upper Bann	16,503	15,813
5016007	Millington PS	Upper Bann	35,984	18,009
5016065	Dickson PS	Upper Bann	18,918	18,745
5016080	Drumgor PS	Upper Bann	26,450	26,163
5016117	Ballyoran PS	Upper Bann	27,313	27,543
5016543	Moyallon PS	Upper Bann	20,729	2,565
5031103	Tannaghmore PS	Upper Bann	37,812	4,934
5031184	St Anthony's PS	Upper Bann	35,317	35,570
5031669	St John's PS	Upper Bann	17,624	17,365

School Ref. number	School Name	Parliamentary Constituency	2007/08	2008/09
5036043	St Mary's PS	Upper Bann	31,798	3,991
5036101	St Brendan's PS	Upper Bann	31,510	31,941
5036173	St John The Baptist PS	Upper Bann	31,050	31,481
5036586	Presentation PS	Upper Bann	0	19,435
5036633	St Francis PS	Upper Bann	38,238	38,376
5230088	St Paul's Junior High School	Upper Bann	34,328	34,397
5230213	Lismore Comprehensive School	Upper Bann	41,860	41,952
5230256	Drumcree College	Upper Bann	30,648	27,945
5250216	Brownlow Int College	Upper Bann	33,293	33,264
5316521	Ceara Special School	Upper Bann	13,915	7,015
Totals			653,864	542,396

NIPSA Staff

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to provide an update on the clearance of the business case on grading and salary increases for NIPSA staff in the Western Education and Library Board. (AQW 391/09)

The Minister of Education: Chuir fostóirí cás gnó i láthair na Roinne ar 29 Lúnasa 2008. Eisíodh freagra tosaigh ar 2 Meán Fómhair 2008 a shainaithin gur éilíodh tuilleadh eolais agus eisíodh freagra tosaigh foirmiúil ar 8 Meán Fómhair a shainaithin na bearnaí criticiúla eolais sa chás gnó.

The Department received a business case from the employers on 29 August 2008. An initial response was issued on 2 September 2008 identifying that further information was required and a formal initial response issued on 8 September which identified the critical information gaps in the business case. The Department will give urgent consideration to the business case which it must be satisfied is robust, consistent and evidence based before it can be presented to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

NIPSA Members

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to avert industrial action by NIPSA members in support of their pay and grading claim. (AQW 392/09)

The Minister of Education: Chuir fostóirí cás gnó i láthair na Roinne ar 29 Lúnasa 2008. Eisíodh freagra tosaigh ar 2 Meán Fómhair 2008 a shainaithin gur éilíodh tuilleadh eolais agus eisíodh freagra tosaigh foirmiúil ar 8 Meán Fómhair a shainaithin na bearnaí criticiúla eolais sa chás gnó.

The Department received a business case from the employers on 29 August 2008. An initial response was issued on 2 September 2008 identifying that further information was required and a formal initial response issued on 8 September which identified the critical information gaps in the business case. The Department will give urgent consideration to the business case which it must be satisfied is robust, consistent and evidence based before it can be presented to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Transfer Test

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if there is a statutory requirement for Primary Schools, in all of the recognised sectors, to provide accommodation within their premises to facilitate the transfer procedure tests at primary seven. (AQW 397/09)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon fhoráil shonrach reachtúil ann a éilíonn ar bhunscoileanna cóiríocht a sholáthar leis an teist aistriú a éascú.

There is no specific statutory provision obliging primary schools to provide accommodation to facilitate the transfer test.

Class Sizes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how many classes in the Upper Bann constituency currently have more than the recommended number of pupils. (AQW 417/09)

The Minister of Education: In the 2007/08 year there was one Foundation Stage class in the Upper Bann constituency that had more than the recommended 30 pupils enrolled. There is no recommended class size for other primary pupils.

Ní chruinníonn an Roinn eolas ar mhéideanna ranganna in iarbhunscoileanna.

Information on class sizes in post primary schools is not collected by the Department.

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education what progress her Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 433/09)

The Minister of Education: Rinneadh dul chun cinn maith i leith na dtáscairí ar fad agus tá mé sásta go mbeimid ábalta na spriocanna a leagadh do 2011 a bhaint amach.

Good progress has been made against all the indicators and I am satisfied that we are on course to meet the targets set for 2011. Achievement of the commitment on the creation of the new Education and Skills Authority remains subject to the passage of the legislation through the Assembly

Life-Start Mid-Ards Organisation

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education if the underspend due to be returned to her Department has been committed to any particular projects; and if she would consider offering funding to the Life-Start Mid-Ards organisation. (AQW 446/09)

The Minister of Education: End of Year Flexibility, (EYF), monies are currently the only under-spends that are due to be returned to my Department. These resources remain committed to individual schools and the Education and Library Boards.

Faoi láthair, maoiníonn mo roinn Mid Ards Life Start trí Ards Sure Start chun cuartaíocht bhaile agus seirbhísí tacaíochta a sholáthar. Tá buiséid go hiomlán leithdháilte agus níl aon acmhainní eile ar fáil.

My department through Ards Sure Start currently fund Mid Ards Life Start to provide home visiting and support services. Budgets are fully committed and no further resources are available.

Rainey Endowed School

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what measures her Department has taken to advance the new build programme for Rainey Endowed Grammar School, Magherafelt. (AQW 460/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil gá le foirgneamh nua scoile ag Rainey Endowed School agus is féidir liom a chur in iúl duit go bhfuil an Roinn ag plé leis an tionscadal seo mar thosaíocht agus tá sí tiomanta dona bheith ag obair go dlúth leo siúd a bhfuil baint acu leis an tionscadal d'fhonn é a thabhairt ar aghaidh.

I am aware of the need for a replacement school building for Rainey Endowed School and can assure you that the Department is treating this project as a priority and is committed to working closely with those involved with the project to move it forward. The Department is currently engaged with the Department of Finance and Personnel in ensuring that a robust business case is in place to allow the project to proceed to the next stage of advertising the project to the market.

School Sports Facilities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action her Department is taking to encourage schools to co-operate with local football clubs to make use of school sports facilities after hours. (AQW 479/09)

The Minister of Education: Under the Recreation and Youth Service Order 1986 the responsibility for the provision of adequate facilities for recreational, social, physical and cultural activities lies with District Councils.

Through the Department's Extended School programme almost 450 of our most socially disadvantaged schools have been identified for funding.

Our policy seeks to establish each extended school as the hub of its local community engaging positively and actively with neighbouring schools, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations in an effort to meet the needs of the pupils in the school. As part of the process of preparing their Extended School action plans, schools were therefore asked to consult with local community and statutory organisations to establish if there are particular community needs which could be met by the school. Greater use of sports facilities would certainly fall into that category.

Of course we cannot expect schools to be able to respond positively to all requests and in the case of sports facilities, indoor or outdoor, wear and tear and insurance will be important considerations but closer links between the school and its community is a key element of the policy and one which we are seeking to develop.

Ag féachaint do ghnáthchaitheamh agus gnáthchuireamh agus d'árachas, ba é an cur chuige ab fhéidir ná go rachfadh clubanna áitiúla peile atá ag iarraidh úsáid a bhaint as áiseanna spóirt go díreach chuig an scoil le plé a dhéanamh ar na socrúithe a d'fhéadfaí bheith ann.

In view of the issues of wear and tear and insurance, the best approach would be for local football clubs wishing to avail of sports facilities, to approach the school direct to discuss what arrangements might be possible.

Champion for Children

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to provide details of (i) the recent appointment of a children's champion; and (ii) any targets or programmes her Department has in place to promote children's rights. (AQW 483/09)

The Minister of Education: The suggestion by the Commissioner for Children and Young People to have a dedicated Champion for Children at senior level in each department was discussed at the first meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People on 13 March and subsequently agreed by all Ministers.

The Champion for Children and Young People in the Department of Education is Louise Warde Hunter, Head of Early Years, Youth and Schools Finance, and the chair of the group is Eddie Rooney, Director of Equality in OFMDFM.

The role of the Champion for Children and Young People is to;

- Liaise with, inform and advise the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to help drive forward agreed policy and to act as a senior point of contact within the department in relation to the Sub-Committee.
- They will also support the department's role in enabling the relevant sub-groups of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People to progress and produce focussed achievable recommendations.
- The Champions will advise and liaise with departmental colleagues on the contribution to the 10 year strategy action planning process and raise awareness at Departmental Board level to encourage departments to ensure children's and young people's interests are fostered and their views sought on policy and strategy issues.

The first meeting of the 'Champions for Children and Young People' took place on 5th August.

Children's rights are embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and in Section 75(1) of the NI Act 1998. All policies and programmes in the Department of Education are scrutinised to ensure compliance with the convention and the Equality requirements of Section 75.

Tá an Chomhairle don Ógra ag tabhairt faoi chomhairliúchán faoi láthair ar fhorbairt Líonra don Óige d'fhonn gur féidir leis an Rialtas glór an aosa óig a chluinstin i dtaca le saincheisteanna a bhaineann leo de réir Airteagal 12 den UNCRC. Cuirfear toradh an chomhairliúcháin sin faoi bhráid na Roinne níos moille san Fhómhar.

The Youth Council is currently undertaking a consultation on the development of a Network for Youth to enable the voice of young people to be heard by Government on issues that affect them in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC. The outcome of that consultation will be presented to the Department later in the Autumn.

North Eastern Education and Library Board

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education what percentage of school children were statemented in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 484/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla seo thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

PERCENTAGE OF STATEMENTED PUPILS IN ALL SCHOOLS – NEELB – 2007/08

Year	Percentage of total enrolment statemented
2003/04	2.82%
2004/05	3.04%
2005/06	3.20%
2006/07	3.35%
2007/08	3.46%

Source: school census 2007/08

Notes:

1. All schools include nursery, primary, post primary and special schools.
2. Statemented pupils are those pupils at stage five of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice.

Requests for Statutory Assessments

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education how many requests for statutory assessment were made in each primary school in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area, in each of the last 5 years; and to detail this figure as a percentage of the entire primary school population. (AQW 485/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt dom nach gcoinnítear an t-eolas seo ar an fhormáid a iarradh agus nárbh fhéidir é a thabhairt ach ar chostas díreireach.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the North – Eastern Education and Library Board that this

information is not held in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Education and Library Boards

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Education to confirm if each Education and Library Board uses common criteria in relation to statutory assessment.
(AQW 486/09)

The Minister of Education:

Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannaigh na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne dom gur chomhaontaigh an Grúpa Athbhreithnithe um Chritéir Réigiúnda critéir réigiúnda, ar bhonn chúig Bhord, sna catagóirí riachtanais speisialta oideachais (SEN) seo a leanas le héifeacht ó mhí Mheán Fómhair 2006:-

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards that the Regional Criteria Review Group agreed regional criteria, on a five Board basis, in the following special educational needs (SEN) categories with effect from September 2006:-

- severe learning difficulties;
- social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;
- physical or medical difficulties;
- sensory impairments – hearing and visual difficulties;

It has also been agreed by all five Boards to implement regional criteria in the following SEN categories with effect from September 2008:-

- learning difficulties;
- specific learning difficulties (literacy).

In addition, action has also been agreed to address the following SEN categories as follows:

- (i) speech and language difficulties – a five Board sub group was established in June 2008 with the brief of drafting regional criteria;
- (ii) assessment of pre-school children – following an initial meeting of South Eastern and Southern Education and Library Board specialist Senior Educational PSychologists, a paper is to be brought to the Principal Educational PSychologists Group with, in due course, draft criteria being presented to the Regional Criteria Review Group for consideration.

Home to School Transport Policy

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Education to outline the transport policy for integrated schools in the Western Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 498/09)

The Minister of Education: The current home to school transport policy applied to the Integrated sector in the Western Education and Library Board is consistent with the policy applied to all school sectors across all five Education and Library Board areas.

Under this policy, Education and Library Boards are required to make such arrangements as they consider necessary to facilitate the attendance of pupils at grant-aided schools. The current arrangements which were introduced in September 1997 restrict transport provision to pupils who have been unable to gain a place in all suitable schools within statutory walking distance of their home (2 miles for primary school age pupils and 3 miles for post-primary school age pupils).

Chun críocha na socruithe iompair, tá sainmhíniú beacht ag an téarma ‘scoil fhóirsteanach’. Baineann sé go heisiach leis na catagóirí bunaithe oideachais, mar atá scoileanna rialaithe, scoileanna faoi chothabháil, scoileanna imeastha agus Gaelscoileanna, agus, i gcás na hearnála gramadaí, scoileanna sainchreidmheacha agus neamh-shainchreidmheacha.

For the purposes of the transport arrangements the term ‘suitable school’ has a precise definition. It relates solely to the established educational categories of controlled, maintained, integrated and Irish-medium, and, in the grammar sector, denominational and non-denominational schools.

Strabane Grammar School and Strabane High School

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made in relation to the proposed merger of Strabane Grammar School and Strabane High School.
(AQW 499/09)

The Minister of Education: Bunaíodh Bord Eatramhach Gobharnóirí agus chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair moltaí isteach ar líon na n-áiteanna agus na n-iontógálacha don scoil chónasctha agus tá an Roinn ag breithniú na moltaí faoi láthair.

An Interim Board of Governors has been established and the Western Education and Library Board has submitted proposals for capacity and intakes for the merged school which the Department is currently considering.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what has been the cost to date of operating the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 506/09)

The Minister of Education: Níl an tÚdarás Oideachais agus Scileanna (ESA) le bheith i ngníomh go dtí 1 Aibreán 2009. Bunaíodh Foireann Feidhmithe an ESA le forfheidhmiú an ESA a thabhairt ar aghaidh agus tabhaíodh costais de £1,814,878 go dtí seo.

The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) is not due to come into operation until 1 April 2009. The ESA Implementation Team was established to take forward the implementation of ESA and the costs incurred to date are £1,814,878.

Entitlement Framework

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the role played by the Department for Employment and Learning, in partnership with her Department, in relation to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework. (AQW 520/09)

The Minister of Education: The Department of Education (DE) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) are seeking, through their respective programmes, to bring forward a co-ordinated approach to 14-19 provision. 14-19 provision, whether at school, Further Education (FE) College or training organisation, must enable young people to acquire qualifications that will lead to further and higher education, training or employment and therefore help them become active contributors to society and the economy.

The Entitlement Framework (EF) is a major focus in the development of 14-19 provision and DE has worked closely with DEL to support the development of collaborative arrangements among schools and between schools and FE Colleges through various programmes, including the 4-year Vocational Enhancement Programme. This co-ordinated approach is continuing with the new support arrangements which have been put in place for the 2008/09 school year.

Tá scoileanna ar fud an tuaiscirt ag obair i gcomhar le Coláistí FE chun Pobail Áitiúla Foghlama (ALCanna) a fhorbairt a fhéachann le comhsholáthar a phleanáil agus a chomhordú ar bhealach comhleanúnach.

Schools across the north are working with FE Colleges in the development of Area Learning Communities (ALCs) which seek to plan and co-ordinate collaborative provision in a coherent way. The development of these ALCs complements the wider development of area-based planning within education. Representatives from DEL and the FE sector have a key role (alongside representatives from the wider education sector) on the Central and Local Area Groups which are taking forward the current Area-Based Planning exercise for Post Primary Education.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education what plans her Department has to (i) improve pay conditions for education welfare officers; and (ii) meet with trade unions in relation to this issue.

(AQW 545/09)

The Minister of Education: Fuair an Roinn cás gnó ó na fostóirí ar 29 Lúnasa 2008. Sainithníodh bearnaí criticiúla eolais agus scríobh an Roinn chuig fostóirí ar 8 Meán Fómhair ag sonrú go mbeadh orthu tabhairt faoi na bearnaí eolais seo.

The Department received a business case from the employers on 29 August 2008. Critical information gaps were identified and the Department wrote to employers on 8 September to have these addressed. As soon as the necessary material is available and the Department is satisfied that the business case is robust, consistent and evidence based, the Department will expedite its presentation to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

The terms and conditions of employment of Education Welfare Officers are a matter for the Education and Library Boards, as employers. There are established industrial relations procedures between the employers and staff representatives by which these issues are addressed.

I will wish to see this issue resolved as soon as possible in order to avoid any detriment to children's education.

Maintenance in Schools

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown by school of the £217 million backlog of maintenance work to be carried out on schools, highlighting work that has health and safety implications. (AQW 548/09)

The Minister of Education: The draft agenda for the next NSMC meeting in Trade and Business Development Sectoral format is under discussion between my officials and officials in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and in that context I will consider the prioritisation of agenda items. Once the agenda is agreed it will be issued to the Executive and the Assembly.

Business Case for Educational Campus at Lisanelly, Omagh

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Education for a timeline for the completion of the business case for an educational campus on vacated Ministry of Defence

land at Lisanelly, Omagh; and when she expects the business case to be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel. (AQW 553/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an cás gnó á thabhairt chun críche faoi láthair agus táthar ag súil leis go gcuirfear i gcrích é sna chéad chúpla seachtain atá romhainn. Tá sé beartaithe go gcuirfear faoi bhráid na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra é an mhí seo chugainn.

The business case is currently being finalised and is expected to be completed with the next few weeks. It is intended that it will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel next month.

Technology Block at Edmund Rice College

Mr Burns asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of the success of the project to build a new technology block at Edmund Rice College; and (ii) to detail (a) the total cost of the project; (b) the time taken to complete the project; and (c) the new facilities available. (AQW 588/09)

The Minister of Education: Having viewed at first hand the new facilities at Edmund Rice College, it is my view that the project has been a great success. The school now has a modern, state of the art Technology & Design and Home Economics facilities enabling it to fully meet the curricular needs of its pupils.

The total cost of the construction is £1.4m with a further £340,000 provided by the North Eastern Education Board for the provision of furniture & equipment for all of the new accommodation.

D'fhaomh an Roinn an gá le bloc nua teicneolaíochta i bprionsabal in 2002, agus cuireadh na céimeanna riachtanacha pleanála i gcrích faoi 2006. Tosaíodh an obair tógála ar 30 Bealtaine 2007 agus críochnaíodh in Iúil 2008 í.

The need for a new technology block was approved in principle by the Department in 2002, and all of the necessary planning steps were completed by 2006. The construction work got underway on 30 May 2007 and was completed in July 2008.

The new accommodation includes the following:-

- Four manufacturing rooms each with an associated systems/planning room;
- Head of Department office;
- Storage and other ancillary accommodation;
- A new Home Economics classroom and associated storage; and
- A multi-purpose area.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education what consideration was given to (a) the qualifications required; (b) nature of duties; (c) areas of responsibility; and (d) pay scales between education welfare officers and comparable grades in other Departments, in setting the current pay levels for education welfare officers. (AQW 612/09)

The Minister of Education: The matter of setting pay and terms and conditions of service for Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) is one for the Employers who, in the case of EWOs, are the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). I understand, from the ELBs that matters of pay and terms and conditions are dealt with through the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) and the parties to that are the ELBs and non-teaching Trade Unions, which include NIPSA.

EWOs pay and terms and conditions fall under the NJC Pay and Terms and Conditions of Service. The process agreed with the Trade Unions to determine the appropriate grade of all such posts is Job Evaluation. The post of EWO was first evaluated in 1997 which resulted in the post being evaluated at the grade of Senior Executive Officer.

Tá nádúr na ndualgas agus na réimsí freagrachta ríthábhachtach agus postmheastóireacht á déanamh agus déantar mioniniúchadh orthu. Ní bhreathnaítear na cáilíochtaí atá ag daoine, ach breathnaítear an t-eolas agus na scileanna a éilíonn an post atá de dhíth le feidhmíocht shásúil an phoist sin a bhaint amach.

The nature of duties and areas of responsibility are of prime importance in the conduct of a job evaluation exercise and are examined in great detail. The qualifications held by an individual are not considered, but rather the knowledge and skills required by the post that are necessary for its satisfactory performance. No direct comparison of the pay scales of EWOs is made with other comparable grades in other Departments; rather, each post subject to evaluation is compared to the common criteria of the job evaluation scheme and in this way the value or rate of pay is established relative one to the other.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education if her Department has carried out any comparison of (a) the qualifications required; (b) nature of duties; (c) areas of responsibility; and (d) pay scales between education welfare officers and comparable grades in other Departments. (AQW 613/09)

The Minister of Education: Is iad na fostóirí a shocraíonn pá agus téarmaí agus coinníolacha seirbhíse Oifigigh Leasa Oideachais (EWOanna) agus

i gcás EWOanna, is iad na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) na fostóirí.

The matter of setting pay and terms and conditions of service for Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) is one for the Employers who, in the case of EWOs, are the Education and Library Boards (ELBs). I understand, from the ELBs that matters of pay and terms and conditions are dealt with through the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) and the parties to that are the ELBs and non-teaching Trade Unions, which include NIPSA. The Department is not directly involved in this process.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the role of education welfare officers. (AQW 614/09)

The Minister of Education: Tugann Oifigigh Leasa Oideachais (EWOanna) tacaíocht do dhaltai agus dá dteaghlaigh, i gcás nuair a bhíonn fadhb ann le freastal leanúnach rialta ar scoil.

Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) support pupils, and their families, where sustained regular attendance at school is a problem. Regular attendance at school is essential if a child or young person is to achieve their full potential and take full advantage of the opportunities to learn provided thorough school. EWOs, therefore, have an important role to play in the challenge of improving the outcomes of all our children.

Pupils Leaving School with no Qualifications

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education what proportion of pupils left school with no qualifications, broken down by ethnic background, in each of the last 3 academic years. (AQW 690/09)

The Minister of Education: Féach an tábla seo thíos.

Please see the table below

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL LEAVERS ACHIEVING NO FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS BY ETHNIC ORIGIN⁽¹⁾

	2004/05 ⁽³⁾	2005/06	2006/07
White ⁽²⁾	851 (3.4%)	795 (3.1%)	720 (2.9%)
Minority Ethnic Groups ⁽²⁾	14 (6.4%)	22 (7.8%)	24 (7.9%)
Total Leavers	873 (3.5%)	817 (3.2%)	744 (3.0%)

Source: School Leavers Survey

1. Excludes special and independent schools
2. 'Minority Ethnic Groups' includes Irish Travellers. The 'White' figures do not include Irish Travellers.
3. In 2004/05 there were 24 pupils for whom an Ethnic group was not given.

Pupil Enrolment in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of pupils in the North Down area that were not enrolled in year eight in schools in North Down. (AQO 131/09)

The Minister of Education: Nuair a tháinig deireadh leis an phróiseas iontrála ag deireadh mhí Bealtaine 2008 bhí 73 páiste ina gcónaí i nDún Thuaidh nár éirigh leo áit a fháil i gceann ar bith de na scoileanna a chuir siad ar a liosta ar a bhFoirm Aistrithe.

When the admissions process concluded at the end of May 2008 there were 73 children resident in North Down who had not gained admission to any of the schools listed on their Transfer form. When this happens, such applicants are invited by the relevant Education and Library Board Transfer Officer to consider schools not listed on their Transfer form but which have places available. This procedure was followed and almost all have been placed with the exception of two children whose families are resident in Bangor, and remain unwilling to accept Year 8 places which are available within a reasonable travelling distance.

Visits by Educational Psychologists to Schools

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education what steps she is taking to increase the number of visits by educational psychologists to schools. (AQO 171/09)

The Minister of Education: Le blianta beaga anuas tá cistí breise tugtha ag an Roinn Oideachais do Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne chun níos mó síceolaithe oideachais a oiliúint agus a fhostú d'fhonn a chur ar a gcumas freastal ar éileamh méadaithe ar chuirteanna scoile.

In recent years the Department of Education has provided Education and Library Boards with further funds to train and employ additional educational psychologists in efforts to enable them to meet increased demand for school visits.

Since 1999 the number of educational psychologists in training at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) has been increased from 5 to 12 per annum, through the provision of additional resources. This increase in trainees has been sustained following the move to a 3-year Doctorate in Child and Adolescent PSYchology course, which replaced the 1-year Master's course in 2006. The Department currently provides funding of approximately £600K per annum to the 5 Boards and QUB, to support the training and placements of the 12 educational psychologists.

The Department continues to work with the Boards and QUB to consider future manpower requirements and to help ensure that supply matches demand.

In addition the vacancy control measures, in place because of the Review of Public Administration, have been lifted in relation to the recruitment of permanent educational psychology staff due to the unique situation of the educational psychology service.

Most Boards operate a Time Allocation model of service delivery to schools which ensures that all schools have a fair share of educational psychologists time. The one Board which does not operate this model, the South-Eastern Education and Library Board, ensures that every school receives a consultation visit early in the school year.

The number of visits to schools by educational psychologists is governed by the resource available to the Boards and Boards currently have a number of vacancies due for instance to career breaks, recruitment difficulties, maternity leave, illness and unfilled posts. Although the first cohort of 12 educational psychologists trained to doctorate level will not qualify until June 2009, there are 24 additional trainees annually, undertaking significant placements with Boards and currently providing support for Board psychology services.

Quite often demand for psychology visits to schools will exceed supply but I have been assured by the Chief Executives of the Boards that all possible steps are being taken to mitigate against ongoing staffing difficulties. Some Boards, for example, have been able to recruit additional educational psychologists to cover for others' absences.

Importantly the Department is currently undertaking a review of Special educational Needs & Inclusion in an attempt to address a number of issues associated to the current SEN framework including inconsistencies and delays in assessment and provision. The proposals which have emerged from the review are due to issue for public consultation in the autumn term of 2008.

Furthermore the Department has recently agreed to a regrading of educational psychologists salaries which will be backdated to September 2001. This will add to the attractiveness of the posts when Boards are recruiting new officers.

Availability of Modern Languages Teachers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to ensure that a fully expert modern languages' teacher will be available to every primary school in the future. (AQO 139/09)

The Minister of Education: Trí theanga a fhoghlaim ag aois óg bíonn tairbhe ann do thaitneamh agus do scileanna teanga na ndaltaí, agus beidh mé ag breathnú soláthair teangacha i mbunscoileanna i gcomhthéacs chur chuige straitéisigh i leith teangacha ag gach leibhéal.

Learning a language from an early age benefits pupils' enjoyment and language skills, and I will be considering primary language provision in the context of a strategic approach to languages at all levels.

There is already a range of good practice in primary schools and I introduced the Primary Languages Programme in the 2007/08 school year. This provides peripatetic support for primary schools wishing to deliver Spanish and Irish, and is expanding, including looking at support for newcomer languages.

The programme also provides opportunities for the professional development of existing primary teachers. To date 284 primary schools have been allocated tutors through this programme.

Taken together, the strategic approach, existing good practice, and programme expansion will allow us to build provision and support the professional development of an increasing number of primary teachers to enable them to teach a second language.

Transfer Arrangements

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Education to detail the post-primary transfer procedure for children currently in P6. (AQO 216/09)

The Minister of Education: Sna tograí a chuir mé faoi bhráid an Fheidhmeannais ar 15 Bealtaine 2008 rinneadh cur síos ar an phróiseas aistrithe chuig iarbhunoidéachas agus tá mé ag dréim leis go dtiocfaidh sé in éifeacht le haghaidh Aistrithe sa bhliain 2010

The proposals which I brought before the Executive on 15 May 2008 and communicated to post primary Principals on 12 June 2008 described the process for transfer to post-primary education which I envisage taking effect for Transfer 2010. To summarise, in September 2010 pupils will begin to transfer to post-primary school at 11 on the basis of non-academic admissions criteria which will be specified in Regulations and will include geography, family criteria, community and socially disadvantaged criteria. To facilitate transition to the new arrangements grammar schools will, for a three year period, be able to apply for bilateral status which will allow for selection of up to 50% of a school's intake in 2010, reducing to 30% and 20% in the two ensuing years.

The pupils who transfer in 2010 will make informed choices about their educational pathway based on the full Entitlement Framework when they reach age 14 in 2013.

Modern Language Graduate Teachers

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education to outline the number of modern language graduates going into teaching. (AQO 136/09)

The Minister of Education: Seo a leanas líon iomlán na mac léinn a bhain céim amach i gcúrsaí in Oideachas tosaigh do Mhúinteoirí Nuateangacha (PGCE) ag Ollscoil na Banríona Béal Feirste agus ag an Ollscoil Oscailte le cúig bliana anuas:

The total number of students graduating from Modern Languages initial Teacher Education (PGCE) courses at Queen's University Belfast and the Open University over the past five years is as follows: -

2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
40	46	48	39	35

Transitional Test for Post-Primary Transfer

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Education to give an update on the transitional test for post-primary transfer being constructed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. (AQO 167/09)

The Minister of Education: Go dtí go mbreathnaíonn an Feidhmeannas mo thograí beartais agus as siocair nár thángthas ar chomhréiteach faoin am seo maidir le bealach chun tosaigh, tá socrúithe curtha i bhfeidhm agam lena chinntiú go bhforbraítear tástáil mar bheart teagmhasachta.

Pending consideration by the Executive of my policy proposals and in the absence at this stage of an agreed way forward, I have put in place arrangements to secure the development of a test as a contingency measure. It takes time to develop, trial and deliver a high-quality test that is fit-for-purpose and robust. The test will focus on literacy and numeracy and not require the distortion of the primary curriculum.

Guidance to Schools on Transfer Procedure in 2009

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Education what guidance she has given to primary schools for the transfer procedure next year. (AQO 192/09)

The Minister of Education: Eisíodh treoir ar an chóras aistrithe maidir le hiontrálacha i mí Mheán Fómhair 2009 chuig gach scoil ar 28 Lúnasa 2008 i bhfoirm Imlitir 2008/16, agus tá cóip di ar fáil ar láithreán gréasáin na Roinne ag http://www.deni.gov.uk/the_procedure_for_transfer_from_primary_to_post-primary_education__2008_09-2.pdf

Guidance on the transfer procedure relating to admissions in September 2009 issued to all schools on 28 August 2008 in the form of Circular 2008/16, a copy of which can be viewed on the Department's website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/the_procedure_for_transfer_from_primary_to_post-primary_education__2008_09-2.pdf

Access to School Transport

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education to detail how many children in the South Down areas, administered by the Southern Education and Library Board and the South Eastern Education and Library Board, are unable to access school transport even though older siblings, attending the same school, are able to travel on school buses provided by these Boards. (AQO 151/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt ar an eolas faoi 4 páiste a chuir isteach ar iompar lamháltais chun taisteal ar sheirbhísí ar a mbíonn siblí níos sine ag taisteal ar bhonn lamháltais.

The Southern Education and Library Board is aware of 4 children who made application for concessionary transport to travel on services already travelled by older siblings on a concessionary basis. Transport was not offered initially due to concerns about potential overcrowding but I can advise that each of these children has now been granted travel on a concessionary basis although no guarantees can be given to these pupils that concessionary transport will be available in future years.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board does not hold information on the number of siblings who have not been allowed to travel on Board transport when their older siblings are availing of such services. In certain circumstances, say in the event of a school closure, only those pupils enrolled in the school at the time of closure may receive transportation under exceptional circumstances to another school. Subsequently, other siblings, who have not been affected by the closure, will be assessed in the normal way and may therefore not be eligible for transport assistance.

I should add that assistance is normally only provided where a child is unable to obtain a place in a suitable school within the statutory walking distance

(2 miles for primary age pupils and 3 miles for others) of the parents' home or where no such suitable school exists within that distance.

As you may also be aware the Department, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment and the Department for Regional Development, has put in place a number of safety measures on school buses including the abolition of the practice of three children sharing a two person seat from September 2007 (except in exceptional circumstances); the abolition of standing on dedicated school buses by September 2009; the fitment of improved lighting and signage to improve the visibility of school buses, expected to be introduced from 2009; and fully seatbelting the Education and Library Boards' school bus fleet by 2011.

Following the abolition of the 3-for-2 seating concession, Education and Library Boards are no longer able to transport the same number of concessionary passengers, as the previously spare seats are now required for those pupils eligible for home to school transport.

Transformation Criteria for Integrated Schools

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the transformation criteria for integrated schools. (AQO 190/09)

The Minister of Education: Agus mé ag breathnú iarratais ar aistriú chuig stádas imeasctha caithfidh mé na rudaí seo a chur san áireamh: inmhathanacht fhadtéarmach na scoile; an dóchúlacht go mbainfidh an scoil an leibhéal riachtanach imeasctha amach; agus an tionchar a d'fhéadfaí bheith ag an aistriú stádais ar scoileanna eile sa cheantar.

In assessing an application for transformation to integrated status I must consider the long-term viability of the school; the likelihood that the school will achieve the required level of integration; and the possible impact of transformation on other schools in the area.

Transformed schools are expected to have minority community representation of 10%, in their first year of transformation, and demonstrate that this will increase to 30% over time. This, I believe, presents schools with an achievable target initially, but one that provides a strong basis from which to meet the longer-term requirement of a realistic level of mixing.

None of this matters, of course, if a school is not viable in the long term, or is likely to have a significant impact on the enrolment of other schools in the area. It is my job to balance the wishes of parents with the need to provide children in all sectors

with a high-quality educational experience. It is my belief that the Sustainable Schools policy and the proposals for Area Based planning, currently out for consultation, will provide the strategic context within which the wishes of parents, and the needs of children, across all sectors can be accommodated.

Circular 2008/16

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the legal standing of circular 2008/16 issued on 29 August 2008. (AQO 157/09)

The Minister of Education: In Imlitir 2008/16 leagtar amach na socrúithe d'aistriú ón bhunoideachas go dtí an iarbhunoideachas a bheidh i bhfeidhm sa scoilbhliain 2008/09, maidir le hiontrálacha i mí Mheán Fómhair 2009.

Circular 2008/16 sets out the arrangements for transfer from primary to post-primary education which will operate in the 2008/09 school year, relating to admissions in September 2009. It does not in itself have statutory force but it communicates to all schools the legislative framework for admissions as set out in the various Education Orders and supporting regulations. This extends to communicating to schools their statutory duties and responsibilities (and those of others) within the admissions process – as set down in law. The circular makes it clear in its opening paragraphs that it is a practical communication of various Education Orders but that these Orders are the authoritative version of its content.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Education when she intends to introduce the relevant legislation for the Education and Skills Authority. (AQO 170/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá sé ar intinn agam an reachtaíocht seo a thabhairt isteach a luaite is féidir sa seisiún seo den Tionól.

It is my intention to introduce this legislation as soon as possible in this session of the Assembly.

Performance of Schools

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Education to explain the wide variation in performance in schools; and if she is aware of the gap in performance between grammar schools. (AQO 236/09)

The Minister of Education: Cé go bhfuil caighdeán fhoriomlána fós ard agus cé go mbaineann cuid mhór scoileanna i ngach earnáil torthaí iontacha

amach, aithním go bhfuil scoileanna ann a bhfuil tearcghnóthachtáil le sonrú iontu.

While overall standards remain high with many schools across all sectors achieving excellent outcomes, I recognise that there are real pockets of underachievement.

The gap in pupil achievement has been highlighted by OECD in their Programme for International Student Assessment Surveys in 2003 and 2006. It is a statement of fact that there is an unacceptable gap between the highest performing schools, and those performing at a lower level. This gap is evident across all phases and sectors, including the grammar sector, and exists even when comparing schools with similar intakes. When we examine the performance of grammar schools there can be a gap as wide as 20 percentage points in the percentage of pupils achieving 7 good GCSEs which include English and Maths. The reasons for the gap differ from school to school.

Our proposed School Improvement Policy, 'Every School a Good School', sets out the key characteristics of effective schools and our school improvement interventions will be shaped by the extent to which those characteristics are present or absent and by evidence of educational underachievement at pupil, class or school level. It is very clear, though, that all schools – including grammar schools – can improve and this needs to be accepted by all. At a system level it is equally clear that educational underachievement needs to be addressed wherever it is identified and our school improvement policy, when finalised, will make clear how that will happen.

School Curriculum

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what requirements will be placed on primary schools to teach the curriculum, rather than preparing for tests that may not be taken. (AQO 180/09)

The Minister of Education:

Éilíonn an dlí go soláthraíonn scoileanna an curaclam reachtúil do dhaltáí den aois éigeantach scoile. Táimid anois i lár chláir céimnithe trí bliana chun curaclam athbhreithnithe reachtúil a chur i bhfeidhm.

Schools are required by law to deliver the statutory curriculum for pupils of compulsory school age. We are in the middle of a three year phased programme of implementing a revised statutory curriculum. This will better prepare children for life and work in the 21st century, providing them with the education and skills they need. Teachers are receiving training, and teaching materials and support are being provided

to help all schools to deliver the revised curriculum. Until such time as the revised curriculum becomes statutory, the previous curriculum remains a requirement.

Schools are also required by law to provide assessment outcomes for pupils at the end of Key Stages 1-3 to the Department, through the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment. In addition, schools are required by law to report to parents.

Neither the Department nor parents will accept any diminution in young people's experiences and opportunities to achieve in school. This will especially be the case if such a situation arose because of teaching to a test for the purposes of post-primary selection.

I am clear that I do not want the transfer arrangements to impact negatively on the revised curriculum. All schools are required to deliver the statutory curriculum and associated assessment and reporting arrangements.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Kilcooley Women's Education Development Group

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures his Department is taking to match fund the Kilcooley Women's Education Development Group. (AQW 259/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department is not an accountable Department for any of the expenditure within the PEACE III Programme, which is administered by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). I understand that a project which is successful in its application to PEACE III will receive all relevant funding from SEUPB.

Property Owned by Queen's University, Belfast

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of residential and commercial properties owned by Queen's University Belfast; and the number of these properties that are currently vacant. (AQW 285/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department does not hold this detailed information. However, Queen's University Belfast (QUB) has advised that the university owns a total of 110

residential and commercial properties, three of which are currently vacant.

Type of property	No. owned by QUB	No. currently vacant
Residential	100	3
Commercial	10	0

Construction Industry

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps his Department is taking to combat growing unemployment for workers in the construction industry. (AQW 444/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A comprehensive range of services is available through my Department's network of 35 Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres and through contracted Providers to help the unemployed find work including those in the construction industry. The services include mandatory work-focused interviews; action planning for certain clients and measures designed to improve the job prospects for those who have become unemployed. These services are subject to regular review to ensure that the public Employment Service in Northern Ireland is fit for purpose in the delivery of Welfare to Work policies.

Plumbing and Heating Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many plumbing and heating courses are available in further education colleges. (AQW 450/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The following Apprenticeship Frameworks are offered by Further Education Colleges in the areas of Plumbing and Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVACR). (The number of classes in any one course will be determined by the number of enrolments):

- Belfast Metropolitan College – Level 2 Plumbing and Level 2 HVACR;
- Northern Regional College – Level 2 Plumbing;
- North West Regional College – Level 2 Plumbing;
- South Eastern Regional College - Level 2 Plumbing, Level 2 HVACR, and Level 3 HVACR;
- South West College – Level 2 Plumbing; and
- Southern Regional College – Level 2 Plumbing.

Plumbing and Heating Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the criteria for access to plumbing and heating courses in each of the further education colleges. (AQW 451/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: SummitSkills is the sector skills council responsible for setting the entry criteria for Apprenticeship Frameworks in plumbing and heating. SummitSkills has stipulated that applicants for Apprenticeship Frameworks at Level 2 and Level 3 require a total of 16 points, derived from all GCSE results; this must include two grade 'C' GCSE qualifications in Maths and English.

These entrance requirements must be observed by all Further Education colleges and training organisations offering plumbing and heating Apprenticeship Frameworks.

Plumbing and Heating Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many places are available in plumbing and heating courses, broken down by further education college. (AQW 452/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A total of 506 places are available in heating and plumbing courses broken down by Further Education College as follows:

- Belfast Metropolitan College – 63
- Northern Regional College – 83
- North West Regional College – 52
- South Eastern Regional College – 144
- Southern Regional College – 100
- South West Regional College – 64

Plumbing and Heating Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students have enrolled in plumbing and heating courses for the 2008-09 academic year, at each further education college. (AQW 453/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Enrolment for courses at all Further Education courses is still underway. To date 297 students have enrolled in heating and plumbing courses, broken down as follows:

- Belfast Metropolitan College – 29
- Northern Regional College – 47
- North West Regional College – 29

- South Eastern Regional College – 87
- Southern Regional College – 54
- South West Regional College – 51

Plumbing and Heating Courses

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, what happens to a plumbing and heating course not receiving its full quota of students.
(AQW 454/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:
In the event that a course does not attract sufficient numbers, it may not be financially viable for that course to proceed. On such occasions, Colleges endeavour to accommodate students by combining classes, offering suitable alternative provision, or referring students to alternative training providers.

Entitlement Framework

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the role played by his Department in relation to the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.
(AQW 508/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:
The Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and the Department of Education (DE) have been working closely on collaborative arrangements between schools and FE Colleges for the introduction of the Entitlement Framework (EF), one of the major elements in the development of education for 14-19 year olds.

Previously, collaboration between schools and colleges has been directed through the Vocational Enhancement Programme (VEP) pilot, which ended in June 2008. The VEP enhanced the profile of professional and technical education and encouraged collaboration between post-primary schools and FE colleges.

DE has introduced new support arrangements for collaboration between schools and other education providers for the 2008/09 academic year which build on the approach developed through the VEP. From September 2008 the responsibility for the funding and administration of the replacement of the VEP transferred to DE, post-primary schools and the Education and Library Boards.

Additionally, FE Colleges are working with partner schools in the development of Area Learning Communities, which seek to plan and co-ordinate post primary education.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's role under the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 509/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:
The Department for Employment and Learning's main role under the Review of Public Administration is to liaise with the Department of Education in relation to the establishment of the policy and legislative framework for the proposed Education and Skills Authority, specifically focussing on those of its proposed functions which directly relate to DEL's work, such as the education of 14 - 19 year olds, jointly with DE, and the vocational qualifications framework.

Within the context of the RPA, Enterprise Ulster was dissolved by the Department with effect from 30 June 2007.

Day Release Students

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) if a day release student can continue with the academic part of their course if their employer can no longer provide them with employment; and (ii) what grants are available for them to continue with their course.
(AQW 559/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:
Under Training for Success, the Pre-Apprenticeship training component is designed for young people aged 16 to 18 who have been assessed as capable of undertaking a Level 2 Apprenticeship, but have not yet found employment. This training component can also accommodate any eligible Level 2 apprentices who have been made redundant, but who wish to continue working towards achieving a professional and technical qualification.

The Department has asked Sector Skills Councils to specify the employability skills and professional qualifications that are to be delivered under Training for Success' Pre-Apprenticeship component. In the main qualifications specified (Technical Certificates) are the same qualifications that comprise the initial part of a Level 2 Apprenticeship Framework. Some Sector Skills Councils, however, have specified different Technical Certificates from those delivered under an Apprenticeship Framework.

Participants undertaking Training for Success are eligible for a Training Educational Maintenance Allowance of £40 per week. Furthermore, eligible participants can access additional funding in relation to childcare and travel costs.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail how much contact his Department has had with the Sector Skills Council (SSC) since 1 January 2008; and what activities have been planned by his Department to promote the development of relationships between SSCs and local employer networks. (AQW 562/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Within the Department, Sectoral Development Branch (SDB) is the sponsor branch responsible for liaison and support of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) in Northern Ireland. Officials from the branch regularly meet with the SSC Northern Ireland National Managers, attend meetings of the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, and attend specific SSC organised events and stakeholder group meetings.

The Department provides funding to the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, which acts as a collective voice of the Sector Skills Councils. One of the key aims of the Alliance is to promote understanding of the role of the Sector Skills Councils amongst employers, employer organisations, and other stakeholders, regionally and sub-regionally. Project funding has been provided to specific SSCs to support employer engagement.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the current relationship his Department has with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs); (ii) confirm that there is a consistent role for all SSCs; and (iii) what his Department's target for achievement is. (AQW 564/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

- (i) Sectoral Development Branch is the sponsor branch within my Department responsible for liaison and support of the Sector Skills Councils in Northern Ireland. It provides advice and guidance to Sector Skills Councils on the production and implementation of their Sector Skills Agreements and also provides funding for projects to support this work. My Department also works with, and provides financial support to, the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to assist with the development and promotion of the Skills for Business Network in Northern Ireland. Officials attend meetings of the Alliance and meet regularly with Northern Ireland Sector Skills Councils managers.
- (ii) The original remit for the Sector Skills Councils were set by the Sector Skills Development Agency and agreed by government. The Agency

also had the monitoring and funding role. With the recent abolition of the Sector Skills Development Agency these functions are now carried out by the newly established UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Northern Ireland, through my Department, is a co-sponsor of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills and Sectoral Development Branch monitors Sector Skills Council performance in Northern Ireland.

- (iii) The Department's target is for all 25 Sector Skills Councils to have achieved their Sector Skills Agreements by December 2008.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department has monitored the activity of Sector Skills Councils to ensure progress on the 'Further Education Means Business' and 'Success Through Skills' strategy reports. (AQW 565/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: FE Means Business and Success through Skills are delivered through a number of projects. The Department has established a Project Managers Group which meets on a quarterly basis to oversee these projects.

One of the projects through which FE Means Business is delivered, is the Reform of Vocational Qualifications. The Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) play a key role in this, and work closely with the Department to ensure that fit for purpose Sector Qualifications Strategies, and qualifications based on National Occupational Standards, are developed to meet the needs of employers within the sector footprint.

The Employers' Skill Needs Analysis project is one of a number of projects through which Success through Skills is implemented. The aim of this project is to put in place a suite of Sector Skills Agreements across all 25 sectors. Sector Skills Council activity in completing this work is monitored by the Department and reported to the Project Managers Group.

Reduction in Construction Activity

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what changes he is considering to his Department's skills priority list, in response to the reduction in construction activity. (AQW 567/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has commissioned a forecast of future skills needs in Northern Ireland based on short,

medium and long term economic predictions. This, in conjunction with other forms of Labour Market Information, such as the All Island Skills Study and information from the Skills Expert Group and six Workforce Development Forums, will inform the Department's decision on whether it will be necessary to review the sectors which it targets.

Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the course provision relating to (i) sport; (ii) the creative industries; and (iii) the arts, at Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster. (AQW 627/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Both institutions provide a number of courses in the areas of sport, the creative industries and the arts. This information has been placed in the library.

Land in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to sell land owned by his Department in the North Down area. (AQW 663/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning does not own any land in the North Down area.

Remuneration of FE College Chairpersons

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for a timeframe for completion of the business case for the remuneration of Further Education College Chairpersons. (AQO 207/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: A business case was submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel in April 2008, however, it was unsuccessful as it was considered there was insufficient evidence to support the request, particularly as similar posts in Great Britain are not remunerated. A fundamental review of college governance arrangements is planned for autumn 2008 which will include the issue of remuneration.

Steps to Work Programme

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide a detailed explanation for the award of a contract to provide the 'Steps to Work'

Programme to a contractor currently the subject of a Proteus and Departmental investigation. (AQO 210/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I am aware that an investigation by the Special European Union Programmes Body has taken place regarding a complaint against a Lead Contractor that has been awarded a Steps to Work Contract.

I am not aware of any grounds for not awarding the contract.

Supply of Labour to the Construction Industry

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to promote the supply of labour into the construction industry. (AQO 160/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The primary responsibility for the promotion of opportunities in specific industry sectors falls to the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC). In this sector ConstructionSkills is the SSC responsible for assessing the number of new entrants required for the construction sector and also promoting the construction industry as an attractive sector to join. It does this through a variety of initiatives including its Positive Image campaign and Women into Construction network.

My Department provides many opportunities for people to train in construction occupations through the Further Education Colleges, the Training for Success and ApprenticeshipsNI provisions.

Apprenticeships are employer-led. Without employers there would be no apprentices and to improve opportunities for individuals I introduced all-age apprenticeships with effect from 1 September 2008 along with enhancing the eligibility criteria by affording opportunities to those contracted to work 21 or more hours per week.

Skills for Financial Services Sector

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to increase the skills base for the financial services sector. (AQO 130/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In addition to work of the Financial Services Sector Skills Council, the Skills Expert Group (SEG) has established a Financial Services Future Skills Action Group to examine the skills needs of the sector in detail. In addition to my Department's work on industry relevant qualifications, the Belfast Metropolitan College and the North West Regional

College have launched Financial Services Career Academies.

Furthermore, the Department has commissioned Foundation Degree Forward to investigate the viability of investing in the development of an employer based Foundation Degree in Financial Services for the market in Northern Ireland. The report is currently being considered by my Department.

Training for Success Programme

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Training for Success programme in relation to outputs in areas of high social exclusion. (AQO 201/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The first recruitment for Training for Success began on 3rd September 2007. As this was in general designed to be a 52 week programme, the Department is only now beginning to receive details of the first cohort of participants who have completed. The provision is also operated on a continuous basis, so participants can enrol at any stage during the year. Consequently, not all participants would have begun the provision in September 2007, and will therefore not have reached the completion stage.

On this programme, trainers and participants agree personal milestones reflecting individual occupational preferences and personal and social development needs. Milestones can include accredited qualifications such as Essential Skills in numeracy, literacy and information technology. They can also address areas such as employability skills, confidence building, health and safety, life skills, equal opportunities, drug and alcohol awareness and interview skills.

To date, 6,236 milestones have been achieved, with 1,442 Essential Skills achievements. Of these, 2,273 milestones and 615 Essential Skills achievements can be mapped against the 36 'Neighbourhood Renewal Areas'.

Further Education Teachers' Salary Dispute

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide an update on the Further Education Teachers' salary dispute. (AQO 147/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In June 2008, the University and College Union (UCU) agreed to a suspension of industrial action by college lecturers in pursuit of their pay claim, and college employers agreed to suspend the proposed disciplinary action against staff. I understand that the college employers and unions will seek to put in place a "one

off" pay deal for the 2008/09 year. Both sides also aim to address longer term pay and conditions issues with the assistance of the Labour Relations Agency.

Belfast Metropolitan College

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the financial pressures being experienced by the Belfast Metropolitan College and any impact on courses and capital projects. (AQO 150/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Belfast Metropolitan College has informed my Department of an anticipated deficit in its accounts in 2008/09. The College's financial difficulties have been attributed to the cost of internal re-structuring and some down-turn in performance in 2007/08, during a period of considerable change. In co-operation with the Governing Body, my Department has commissioned an Efficiency Review to establish more precisely the cause and extent of the College's financial difficulties. There is no suggestion that capital projects or courses will be adversely affected during any period of corrective action on College finances.

Match Funding for ESF Training Projects

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to comment on the availability of public sector match funding for European Social Fund training projects. (AQO 196/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme 2007-13 provides projects with 65% programme funding, made up of 40% from European Union Funds and a 25% contribution from the Department for Employment and Learning. The remaining 35% 'match funding' must be secured independently from other public sources by the project promoters. This is the same procedure as used for previous European Social Fund Programmes. Of the 76 projects selected for funding, to date 63 have secured their match funding for this year.

South Eastern Regional College

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) courses; and (ii) places, were offered at the Ards campus of the South Eastern Regional College this year; and how many places have been filled to date. (AQO 214/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The South Eastern Regional College has informed me

that a maximum of 8,382 places will be offered across 481 courses at the Ards Campus during the 2008/09 academic year.

To date, 1,172 places have been filled. However, course enrolment takes place throughout the academic year. Final data on the number of places filled by the College will not therefore be available until the end of the academic year (July 2009).

Pathways to Work Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the progress of the Pathways to Work scheme. (AQO 199/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Pathways to Work scheme is now available throughout Northern Ireland. Performance so far has been as good as, and in some respects better than, in Great Britain. 2,091 people have been helped into work through Pathways and increases in off-flow from benefits of 8% to 10% have been achieved. We expect to publish a detailed interim evaluation soon.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what meetings he has held with the senior management of Stranmillis University College over the last six months. (AQO 161/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I met with the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College, on 18 June 2008.

STEM Courses

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration has been given to measures to promote the uptake of STEM courses at university. (AQO 159/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Department for Employment and Learning, in conjunction with the Department of Education, has initiated a review of STEM subjects in schools and Further Education colleges. The outcomes of the review, expected shortly, consider progression routes to higher education and employment, including the links to the skills and innovation needs of the wider economy.

Both Departments will consider carefully the recommendations in the review report in order to promote STEM in Northern Ireland.

Examples of best practice exist already. The Step-Up programme, operated by the University of Ulster, has been running successfully for 7 years and actively involves the university, schools, local industry, local hospitals and government agencies. The programme encourages pupils from secondary schools in disadvantaged areas to study science at university.

Northern Ireland universities are also working to complement the work of Government in aiming to increase the number of high quality school-leavers going on to take STEM subjects at university.

For example, Queen's University Belfast provides a scholarship of £1000 to students who achieve three grade As at A level and who study a STEM subject (except Medicine and Dentistry).

Meetings with the Transferors Representatives

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what meetings he has held with representatives of the Transferors Representatives regarding the future of teacher training. (AQO 166/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I met with two representatives of the Transferors Representatives Council on 5 June 2008 to discuss the future of teacher training in Northern Ireland.

Step2Work Contracts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to conduct an urgent review of the Step2Work procurement process prior to the Step2Work Contracts going "live", given concerns about the procurement process. (AQO 146/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

The Steps to Work tendering process was managed by Central Procurement Directorate and I am content with the advice and guidance received from them. The procurement process is quality assured and meets the ISO 9001 standards and also adheres to the 12 principles of Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy as laid down by the Executive in May 2002. Any review of the Procurement Process would be a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Science Park at Magee Campus

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has held discussions with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the development of a Science Park

facility at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster. (AQO 224/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

I have not held formal discussions with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the development of a Science Park facility at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster.

The facility is initially the responsibility of the Minister for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI).

I would be happy to be involved in discussions if this would be useful.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Reconnect Programme

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available under the Reconnect scheme; and what the maximum available grant is. (AQW 238/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The household renewable energy grant scheme, 'Reconnect', closed to applications on the 31 March 2008. It is expected that the target of 4000 renewable energy installations will be met. The maximum grant available under the scheme was £15,000.

Rising Energy Costs

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to help the private sector cope with rising energy costs. (AQW 363/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department has no role in determining energy prices but strives to create market conditions that over the long term will drive down energy prices. Northern Ireland's electricity market was fully opened to competition to all customers from 1 November 2007. The gas supply market in the Phoenix Natural Gas licence area of Greater Belfast, Lisburn and Larne was opened to all customers from 1 January 2007.

The Single Energy Market should result in downward pressure on wholesale electricity costs that will ultimately be reflected in lower retail prices. The latest electricity price review includes Public Service Obligation (PSO) charges being allocated equally

across all consumer groups and helps deal with a long standing call from business for a fairer allocation of the PSO element of the electricity tariff. In addition, the Department is committed to a greater proportion of energy coming from renewable sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and their associated global price volatility.

Invest NI has funded local Carbon Trust activities since 2002. Since that time £120 million of potential energy savings have been identified in Northern Ireland businesses which has led to over £50 million in actual savings per year through implementation of energy saving and efficiency measures in the private sector. Invest NI is planning to fund Carbon Trust to the tune of £13.4million up to March 2011 to expand and develop Carbon Trust activities with the private sector in Northern Ireland.

As well as advisory and technical visits and reports on efficiency measures Carbon Trust offers interest-free loans to assist companies to install energy efficient machinery and plant. 147 companies have benefited from the loans over the last five years.

As Northern Ireland's economic development agency Invest NI promotes innovation, enterprise and international competitiveness in Northern Ireland businesses. It encourages and supports research and development of energy efficient and renewable energy technologies. It also manages the local delivery of UK-wide programmes such as the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme and Envirowise that are designed to assist business reduce material consumption, minimise waste production and capitalise on commercial exchange of materials, waste and water – all of which also lead to reduced energy costs.

Projects in Upper Bann

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what projects her Department delivered in the Upper Bann constituency in 2007-08; and what projects have commenced, or are due to commence, in 2008-09. (AQW 366/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Details of projects delivered in the Upper Bann constituency in 2007-08; and projects which have commenced, or are due to commence in 2008-09 are listed in the attached tables.

In addition to the projects listed, Reconnect, the household renewable energy grant scheme which closed to applications on 31 March 2008 had Northern Ireland wide coverage in 2007/08 including Upper Bann. Up to 50% grants were paid for the following technologies; Solar PV, Solar Hot Water, Wind

Turbines, Small Scale Hydro, Heat Pumps, Wood Fuelled Boilers and Wood Pellet Stoves.

Also, in 2007/08, buildings within the Craigavon Borough Council area benefited from the installation of wood derived biomass heating. This, combined with additional energy efficiency measures and other forms of renewable technologies on each site show best practice across many sectors within the area.

NORTHERN IRELAND TOURIST BOARD PROJECTS

Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency delivered in 2007/08	Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency due to commence in 2008/09
Armagh Down Tourism Partnership	Armagh Down Tourism Partnership
	St. Patrick & Christian Heritage Signature Project
	Enterprise Barge Restoration Project, Craigavon
	Bringing People Closer to Nature at Portmore Lough Craigavon

INVEST NI PROJECTS

Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency delivered in 2007/08	Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency due to commence in 2008/09
Business Support to Almac Clinical Technologies Ltd	Industrial Land Development – Completion of projects to further develop three industrial estates in the Constituency.
Business Support to Evron Foods	
Business Support to Moy Park Foods	
Business Support to W D Irwin & Sons Ltd	
Business Support to Radius Plastics Ltd	
Business Support to Armaghdown Creameries Ltd	
Business Support to Crossbows Optical Ltd	
Business Support to Victor Bowman	
Business Support to Huhtamaki (Lurgan) Ltd	
Business Support to K-Space (NI) Ltd	
Business Support to Vogue Surrounds Limited	
Business Support to Kestrel Foods Ltd	
Business Support to Mind Associates Ltd	

Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency delivered in 2007/08	Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency due to commence in 2008/09
Business Support to Delta Trading Ireland Ltd	
Business Support to Dooloop Limited	
Business Support to Almac Clinical Services Ltd	
Business Support to Interface Europe Ltd	
Business Support to Darryl T E Hylands & Beverley A Hylands	
Business Support to Magowan Originals Ltd	
Business Support to Douglas Architectural Systems Ltd	
Business Support to Brian McCoy	
Business Support to Jackson Reece Ltd	
Business Support to Deluxe Art & Theme Limited	
Business Support to David & Thomas McClimond	
Business Support to Alan Little Limited	
Business Support to Growmoor Horticulture Ltd	
Business Support to Titan Environmental Ltd	
Business Support to Seagoe Technologies Ltd	
Business Support to Portadown Locksmiths Limited	

E II & EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME PROJECTS

Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency delivered in 2007/08	Projects specific to Upper Bann Constituency due to commence in 2008/09
Brownlow Limited	
Craigavon Innovation Centre, Technology Park	

Reconnect Programme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the evaluation of the renewable energy based Reconnect scheme will be published.

(AQW 389/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: The Reconnect programme, which ended on 31st March 2008, is currently being evaluated by independent consultants in line with the Department's evaluation protocol.

It is anticipated that the report will be available for me by the end of November 2008.

After I have considered the report, it will be forwarded to the ETI Committee and published on the DETI website.

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress her Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments.

(AQW 468/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and

Investment: DETI's Corporate Plan, 2008-11, and the accompanying Operating Plan for 2008/09, have been developed to ensure full consistency with the key PfG / PSA priorities that fall to my Department. These priority areas are:

- Improving manufacturing and private services productivity (PSA 1);
- Increasing employment (PSA 3); and
- Tourism (PSA 5).

The Department also has responsibility for some action points in the context of two other PSAs: Housing, Urban Regeneration and Community (PSA 12); and Protecting our Environment and Reducing our Carbon Footprint (PSA 22).

During the first quarter of 2008/09 the Department and its NDPBs have made good progress on key targets. Examples include the delivery of:

- 7 inward investment projects offering 203 jobs;
- £19.4m of wages and salaries secured from inward investment and growth from locally-owned clients;
- £29m investment in Research & Development; and
- 21 Export Start projects exporting to GB.

Going forward, we need to recognise that the downturn in the global economy is likely to make it harder to deliver some PSA targets, in the short to medium term at least. This applies particularly to those targets which depend on investment decisions by companies and those which depend on expenditure decisions by the tourist industry and by tourists.

DETI will continue to monitor results closely.

Tariff Levels

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will detail the current tariff levels levied on (i) domestic customers via the Home Energy tariff; (ii) small businesses and farms via the farm popular tariff; and (iii) large businesses via the multi rate tariff, and show how these tariff levels have changed in the period 2003 to 2008.

(AQW 596/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: NIE Energy has provided the Department with this information, which is tabulated below.

Tariff	NIEES Electricity prices in p/kWh (excluding VAT and climate change levy)			
	Domestic	Farm	Small business	Medium business
	Home Energy	Farm Popular	Popular Option	MV multirate
Apr-03	9.38	9.2	9.8	7.3
Apr-04	9.64	9.2	9.8	7.7
Aug-04	9.64	10.0	10.2	8.2
Apr-05	9.95	10.5	11.1	8.5
Apr-06	11.02	11.6	11.9	9.3
Apr-07	10.69	11.2	11.9	9.7
Nov-07	11.11	11.5	11.6	10.4
Jul-08	12.66	13.2	13.2	12.3
Oct-08	16.88	17.7	17.1	14.2

Tariff	Annual charges (including VAT but excluding climate change levy)			
	Domestic	Farm	Small Business	Medium business
	Home Energy	Farm Popular	Popular Option	MV multirate
Apr-03	£325	£2,339	£1,726	£22,682
Apr-04	£334	£2,339	£1,726	£23,671
Aug-04	£334	£2,531	£1,803	£25,402
Apr-05	£345	£2,652	£1,956	£26,205
Apr-06	£382	£2,938	£2,092	£28,647
Apr-07	£370	£2,841	£2,103	£29,945
Nov-07	£385	£2,915	£2,045	£32,117
Jul-08	£439	£3,347	£2,324	£38,078
Oct-08	£585	£4,485	£3,016	£44,005

Notes:

1. Electricity prices in p/kWh from published rates.
2. VAT has been included in the table of annual charges - 5% domestic

and 17.5% non domestic except Farms where a composite 15% has been assumed (based on 80%/20% business/domestic use).

3. Climate change levy (CCL) has been excluded from all business and farm charges.
This is currently 0.456 p/kWh.
4. Annual fuel price adjustment has been included in the multirate tariff price up to July 2008.

Satellite Technology

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to develop the approach to broadband from March 2009, particularly in relation to the services currently provided by satellite technology. (AQW 729/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is actively working on an approach to next generation broadband services. A consultation has already taken place with the telecoms industry and the wider business community and we are considering the best way forward for Northern Ireland. Specifically in relation to satellite, when the contract with BT ends on 31st March 2009 the satellite product provided under the contract will no longer be available and customers are being informed of this. However, recognising the importance of the availability of broadband communications for the economy as a whole, my Department is issuing a tender worth up to £1.1m, inviting commercial companies to bid to continue to provide broadband services across all of Northern Ireland. It is expected that when complete, arrangements will be in place to continue the provision of broadband services, so that any business and any household who wishes to avail of a broadband service will be able to do so.

Assistance for Businesses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what steps her Department is taking to assist businesses in the current economic climate. (AQO 152/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has developed a programme of actions and initiatives designed to help businesses to tackle the potential impact of a sustained economic downturn. In particular, it has focused on the areas of cash flow management, cost reduction and improving production efficiency.

At the end of this month, Invest NI will hold two awareness seminars, in Belfast and Cookstown, to offer practical specialist advice to businesses. These will be followed by a series of similar events across its Regional Office Network.

As a follow on from these, Invest NI will also offer up to five days free on-site diagnostic support to those clients with an identified urgent business need with the objective of developing remedial actions.

In addition to its wide range of existing programmes, Invest NI is also currently developing a number of new products in key areas such as cost reduction and energy efficiency. It has also added a new 'Beat the credit crunch' section to the nibusinessinfo.co.uk website. This provides practical advice and guidance in managing finance and steps to improve efficiency.

In relation to the market for foreign direct investment, there is some evidence that the volume of investment decisions is declining and that investors are deferring their expansion plans. Nevertheless, Invest NI is seeking to exploit this situation by marketing Northern Ireland as a cost competitive location. It is targeting investment prospects which are driven by cost reduction or are seeking to position themselves in preparation for the situation improving.

Abbey and Invest NI Financial Services Training Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many school leavers will benefit from participation in the Abbey and Invest NI Financial Services Training Scheme. (AQO 181/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Abbey School Leavers Programme is a pilot initiative that has generated significant interest. 120 applications were received for the 12 available places.

The Programme commenced this month and the successful entry-level participants are expected to progress over four years to become Mortgage Advisors or Team Managers within Abbey. Successful applicants will also be awarded Chartered Banker status, which is a degree level qualification, and which includes the award of certificates in mortgage and investment advice.

If the Programme proves successful in Northern Ireland, it is expected to be rolled out to other key Abbey locations across the UK next year.

Provision of Heat and Power to Local Communities

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what consideration she has given to the formation of co-operatives or

initiatives to encourage companies to provide heat and/or power to local communities. (AQO 219/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI issued a call for energy from waste projects in October 2006. This brought forward several projects that generate heat and power from waste for use on the commercial site where the energy is being produced. In addition, the Department of Environment and Department of Finance and Personnel have recently approved the outline business case for the arc21 Waste Infrastructure project. This project includes an energy from waste facility, with the potential to develop a district heating system.

DETI is also exploring with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, the inclusion of Northern Ireland in a technical analysis of the potential for district heating networks.

DETI commissioned research in 2007 into the creation of renewable energy based Energy Services Companies, known as ESCO's, in Northern Ireland. There are currently three organisations in Northern Ireland offering ESCO services. The research identified some significant constraints and barriers to further market development. These will require further consideration, not least because of the high level of capital investment required.

Relocation of Businesses to Northern Ireland

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to encourage businesses based in the Republic of Ireland to relocate to Northern Ireland. (AQO 156/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI's marketing and sales strategy for identifying and attracting inward investment opportunities from the Irish Republic, focuses on the Financial Services and ICT / Software sectors.

The Northern Ireland sales proposition is:

Firstly, that it can complement and support the future success of existing operations in the Irish Republic;

Secondly, that it offers a completely separate pool of labour from the rest of the island and has major concentrations of highly skilled workers at competitive costs and lower levels of attrition; and,

Thirdly, that it offers geographical and cultural proximity to the existing Irish operations. This offers management efficiencies and mitigates against many of the negative aspects involved with setting up in offshore locations.

Invest NI implements direct marketing and sales campaigns in the greater Dublin area and elsewhere in Ireland, notably Cork, Limerick and Galway.

Discussions with the Utility Regulator

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the utility regulator to ensure that the proposed rises in energy costs by privately owned utility companies are justified. (AQO 202/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I met the Utility Regulator to discuss the proposed price rises by NIE Energy and Phoenix Supply Ltd. I received assurances on the level of detailed scrutiny which his office conducted. Moreover, my Department was fully involved in the consultation process before the Regulator concluded that the increases, while disappointing, were justified on the basis of significant increases in wholesale fuel costs.

My Department has no direct role in determining energy prices, but strives, in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, to create market conditions that, over the long term, aim to drive down energy prices.

However, in light of the concerns about the scale of the electricity price rise in particular, I sought proposals from the Regulator about how best to ensure full public confidence in the tariff setting process. I am pleased that he has responded by confirming that he has commissioned an independent review by the former Regulator, Douglas McIlldoon.

Renewable and Indigenous Energy Supplies

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the outline actions her Department intends to take to accelerate the introduction of renewable and indigenous energy supplies, for electricity generation, heating and transport sectors. (AQO 218/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Sustainability and maximising use of renewable energy will be a key focus of a revised Strategic Energy Framework which my Department is currently developing. The ETI Committee was briefed on this matter last week.

Following consultation on that strategic work, I aim to publish a Framework in 2009. This will set out the actions that will take to increase significantly renewable energy use across the range of energy sectors.

In parallel, my Department is reviewing the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation to provide more support to emerging technologies; starting work on a renewable heat policy; proceeding with a Strategic Environmental Assessment to facilitate the development of offshore wind and tidal potential; and working with the Department for Transport in GB on the UK-wide Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation.

Carbon Trust Funding

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many companies have reduced their energy costs as a result of Carbon Trust Funding. (AQO 178/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Carbon Trust's activities in Northern Ireland are funded by Invest NI.

Carbon Trust activities have helped to reduce the energy costs of 941 companies in Northern Ireland over the five years to 31 March 2008. Events and workshops have provided specialised energy technology best practice training to over 4,000 delegates.

Carbon Trust has identified energy savings of over £100 million through on-site energy audits and technical assessments. Approximately £50 million pounds worth of energy savings have thus far been realised through supported projects. Future savings in lifetime energy costs are projected to be in the region of £222 million, which equates to 2 million tonnes of carbon saved. The projects have also generated more than £70 million of work in the service sector of the Northern Ireland economy.

The Carbon Trust forecasts that a further 360 companies will benefit directly from its activities over the next three years.

Redundancies in the Building Industry

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many redundancies there were in the building industry during the period January to August 2008. (AQO 241/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Companies are legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies when they affect 20 or more employees. Under this criterion, the Department has been notified of no such confirmed redundancies in the construction sector during the period January to August 2008.

Between January and August 2008, the number of claimants of unemployment related benefits whose

usual occupation was in the Construction Industry increased by 1,005 or 22% to 5,585. This compares with an increase of 5,087 or 21% in the total number of claimants in Northern Ireland over the same period.

North West Gateway Initiative

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what role her Department has played in the North West Gateway Initiative. (AQO 197/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department has been involved in the North West Gateway Initiative since its launch in 2006. There have already been significant outcomes in terms of investment in telecommunications and energy infrastructure, the promotion of the North West as a tourism and investment location and the development of regional business/academic clusters. Officials from my Department and Invest NI participated in a joint OFMDFM and Department of Foreign Affairs led delegation to update North West stakeholders in July 2008.

Increased Unemployment of Construction Workers

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to combat the growing number of construction workers becoming unemployed. (AQO 200/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department does not have responsibility for the construction sector in Northern Ireland.

However, my colleague Nigel Dodds, Minister of Finance and Personnel, has advised that Government spending on construction has been increasing significantly over recent years. Spend last year is expected to have exceeded £1.2 billion which represents about 40% of the industry's total turnover. The level of public sector spend is set to continue to increase with the Investment Strategy for 2008-2011 and beyond.

Departments are currently working to deliver capital investment of £1.8 billion during this financial year and it is hoped that this increased investment by Government will offset some of the current pressures on the construction industry.

Economic Inactivity

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what efforts her Department is undertaking to reduce the rate of economic inactivity. (AQO 175/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI's role is to contribute to growing a dynamic, innovative economy; the top priority in the Programme for Government. As part of this, the Department is working to raise employment levels by increasing inward and domestic investment, and also through the promotion of business growth. This will provide employment opportunities for all in the labour market, including those currently classified as economically inactive.

DETI and Invest NI also encourage employers to source, where appropriate, labour from the economically inactive. For example, Invest NI works closely with DEL to ensure that its existing clients and prospective inward investors are made aware of the benefits of utilising DEL programmes, such as Bridge to Employment, to source suitable employees, including those from the economically inactive.

DETI does not have any specific targets within the Programme for Government in relation to reducing the level of economic inactivity. However it continues to work alongside DEL which has the lead policy responsibility, and resources, for delivering the targets within PSA 3.

Increase in Gas and Electricity Prices

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what actions her Department intends to take in light of the recent announcement of increases in gas and electricity prices. (AQO 217/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The recent gas and electricity price increases were the subject of detailed scrutiny by the Utility Regulator, who concluded that the increases were justified as a result of significant increases in wholesale fuel costs.

However, in light of the concerns about the scale of the electricity price rise in particular, I sought proposals from the Regulator about how best to ensure full public confidence in the tariff setting process. I am pleased that he has responded by confirming that he has commissioned an independent review by the former Regulator, Douglas McIlDoon.

ENVIRONMENT

Craigavon Divisional Planning Office

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment the average length of time it takes to process a planning application from application to approval, in the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office. (AQW 295/09)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The average length of time taken to process a planning application to approval in the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office is set out in the table below.

AVERAGE PROCESSING TIME (IN WORKING WEEKS) FROM APPLICATION TO DECISION FOR APPROVALS IN CRAIGAVON

	06/07	07/08
Major	36	32
Intermediate	44	49
Minor	21	19

Source: 07/08 Dataset

Figures are only available for the 06/07 & 07/08 financial years. We are currently in the process of preparing the 05/06 – 02/03 data and hope to have this information available during October 2008. The median is provided as average.

Craigavon Divisional Planning Office

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many valid planning applications have been received by the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 296/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The number of valid planning applications received by the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office is highlighted in the table below.

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT

	06/07	07/08
Armagh	1012	979
Banbridge	974	819
Craigavon	1109	1034
Newry & Mourne	2066	1624
Total	5161	4456

Figures are only available for the 06/07 & 07/08 financial years. We are currently in the process of

preparing the 05/06 – 02/03 data and hope to have this information available during October 2008.

Craigavon Divisional Planning Office

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been approved by the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 297/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The number of planning applications approved by the Craigavon Divisional Planning Office is highlighted in the table below. Figures are only available for the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 financial years. We are currently in the process of preparing the 2005/2006 – 2002/2003 data and hope to have this information available during October 2008.

APPLICATIONS APPROVED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT

	06/07	07/08
Armagh	899	1333
Banbridge	685	957
Craigavon	847	989
Newry & Mourne	1230	1880
Total	3661	5159

Party Wall etc. Act 1996

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment if he will introduce legislation similar to the Party Wall etc. Act 1996. (AQW 299/09)

The Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to introduce such legislation.

Historic/Listed Buildings

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what powers his Department has to ensure that necessary restorative and protective work is carried out on historic/listed buildings; and how many times these powers have been invoked, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 300/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has powers to protect buildings of 'special architectural or historic interest' which are listed under Article 42 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 (the Order).

Planning Control

Article 44 of the Order provides control of works for demolition, alteration or extension of listed buildings.

Over the past three years the following consultations have taken place on proposed works to listed buildings -

September 05 - August 06	1638
September 06 - August 07	1773
September 07 - August 08	2025

Urgent Works Notice

Article 80 (1) of the Order states that 'Where it appears to the Department that works are urgently necessary for the preservation of –

(a) a listed building, ...the Department may, subject to the following provisions of this Article, execute the works, which may consist of or include works for affording temporary support or shelter for the building.'

This power has been used on one occasion, over the last three years, in July 2008 - to protect a listed building at risk - the Stable Block in Sion Mills.

Compulsory Acquisition

Article 109 of the Order provides the statutory authority for the compulsory acquisition of listed buildings. The first (and only) compulsory acquisition of a listed building under this Order – the Stable Block at Sion Mills – was completed on 19 July 2008, when the building was brought into my Department's ownership.

Temporary Listing: Building Preservation Notices (BPNs)

Article 42A of the Planning Amendment Order 2003 provides for so called 'spot listing' of buildings which appear to be of special architectural or historic interest and which are '... in danger of demolition or alteration in such a way as to affect its (their) character as a building of such interest.'

Over the past three years the following BPNs have been issued –

September 05 - August 06	0
September 06 - August 07	3
September 07 - August 08	9

Historic/Listed Buildings

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment if he will review the current levels of grants available to owners of historic/listed buildings to enable necessary repairs and restoration to proceed; and what action he will take to co-ordinate Departmental funding with other sources. (AQW 301/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has completed a review of the levels of grant-aid to listed buildings and a new grant-aid scheme was launched on 20 May 2008. As a result of the review, grant-aid at 35% is now available for the repair or maintenance of Grade B2 secular buildings - which were previously ineligible - as well as for all other grades of secular buildings.

The rate of assistance for grade B1 buildings has been increased from 20% to 35% and the new level of grant has been set at 35% for most eligible cases. For thatched roofs grant-aid is available to fund 75% of costs. Related professional fees of appropriately qualified advisors can also be grant-aided at 75%. Enhanced grant-aid of 90% may be applicable to owners of listed buildings who are in receipt of Income-based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support or Guaranteed Pension Credit.

In addition, a new grant initiative, of up to £500K per annum has been set aside to help fund Building Preservation Trusts or other charities seeking assistance with the acquisition costs of Listed Buildings at Risk in Northern Ireland.

An additional £1.5m, on top of the existing budget of £2.4m, has been made available to help fund this new grant-aid scheme.

Grant-aid is also available for churches of Grade B+ and above. A separate review of funding for ecclesiastical buildings has just commenced.

My Department currently engages with other government departments and external funders to establish funding input from other sources along with the conditions and programmes for such funding. In addition, representatives of the Department attend 'funders' meetings for larger grant-aided schemes, for example, the Crescent Arts Centre and Ulster Hall conservation projects.

Pollution

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking, in conjunction with other relevant departments, agencies and councils, to protect streams in the Three

Milewater and Six Milewater catchment areas from pollution risks. (AQW 302/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is working with a range of organisations including the following:

- Department of Education;
- Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure;
- Northern Ireland Water;
- Local Councils and Angling Clubs; and
- Local Stakeholder Groups.

A number of problems have already been identified in these catchments and work is underway to address them. These include problems with sewage discharges, cross connections in storm sewers and work to develop re-instatement plans following recent fish kills.

In addition, a range of targeted measures are planned to deal with potential problems in both catchments to reduce the risk of water pollution in the future.

North-South Confederation of Councillors

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to comment on the situation regarding funding of the North-South Confederation of Councillors. (AQW 316/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has had several approaches from the North-South Confederation of Councillors for a financial contribution. However, due to limited resources and serious pressures on the budget, the Department has been unable to make an offer of funding.

Wind Turbines

Mr Burns asked the Minister of the Environment how many wind turbines there are in the South Antrim constituency; and to detail the locations and owners of those wind turbines that are publicly owned. (AQW 327/09)

The Minister of the Environment: 44 wind turbines have been granted planning approval within the South Antrim Constituency.

There are currently 8 applications for wind development within the planning system proposing a total of 20 turbines.

The only wind turbine in this area known to be publicly owned is that at Antrim Area Hospital.

Divisional Planning Offices

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of the Environment how many commercial planning applications have been (i) submitted; (ii) approved; and (iii) rejected, over the last 2 years, broken down by Divisional Planning Office. (AQW 345/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has provided the following statistics detailing how many commercial planning applications have been (i) submitted; (ii) approved and (iii) rejected, over the last 2 years, broken down by Divisional Planning Office.

Commercial applications include planning applications for shops, car parks, hotels and restaurants, offices and motor trade facilities.

Division	No. Commercial Applications Received 06/07	No. Approved 06/07	No. Refused 06/07
Ballymena	207	148	18
Belfast	378	326	16
Craigavon	237	177	25
Downpatrick	207	205	19
Headquarters	17	7	0
Londonderry	255	192	34
Omagh	255	197	28

Division	No. of Commercial Applications Received 07/08	No. Approved 07/08	No. Refused 07/08
Ballymena	200	155	15
Belfast	353	296	20
Craigavon	219	206	26
Downpatrick	208	185	9
Headquarters	11	3	1
Londonderry	243	206	46
Omagh	252	222	28

Applications received in any year may not be determined in the same year. Therefore direct comparisons between 06/07 and 07/08 figures should not be made.

These figures have been extracted from a live database which is continuously updated and validated. They should therefore be regarded as indicative only

at this point in time and should not be compared with any previous figures published by the Agency.

Draft ABL Plan 2016

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of the Environment when the draft Antrim, Ballymena and Larne area plan 2016 will be published; and to detail the reasons for the 7 year delay in its publication. (AQW 414/09)

The Minister of the Environment: I regret that progress on the draft ABL Plan has not been as quick as my Department would have desired. This has resulted from limited resources, competing work priorities and unprecedented workload pressures in both the Operations Directorate and Strategic Planning Directorates of Planning Service. I am aware that unfortunately my Department has been unable to achieve the timescale for publication of the draft ABL Plan 2016 of the last quarter of the 07/08 financial year, or at the latest the first quarter of the 08/09, which my predecessor Arlene Foster advised you of in her letter to you of 27th November 2007. This further delay is due to the judicial challenges to the Environmental Reports which accompanied the Draft Northern and Magherafelt Area Plans and the Department's appeal of the judgement arising from those challenges which has now been referred by the Appeal Court to the European Court of Justice.

My Department is currently considering the implications of this referral for its entire development plan programme and I will ensure that you are advised of any implications arising for the publication timescale for the draft ABL Plan 2016 as soon as it becomes practicable to do so.

DVA Expenditure

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the money spent on the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) in each of the last 3 years, broken down by each DVA location. (AQW 448/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The table below provides the detail of Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) expenditure in respect of each DVA location.

DVA Testing Expenditure	2005/06	2006/7	2007/08
Location	£	£	£
Armagh	684,233	755,925	838,815
Ballymena	1,107,579	1,214,661	1,561,335
Belfast	1,912,356	2,311,155	2,160,406

DVA Testing Expenditure	2005/06	2006/7	2007/08
Location	£	£	£
Dill Road Belfast	20,699	24,033	19,462
Coleraine	1,080,934	1,256,760	1,264,886
Cookstown	1,184,088	1,536,434	1,289,604
Craigavon	1,012,613	1,120,101	1,217,496
Downpatrick	761,341	834,183	933,975
Enniskillen	782,929	850,927	959,843
Larne	890,144	874,563	993,488
Lisburn	1,047,373	1,149,967	1,170,877
Londonderry	1,112,717	1,206,149	1,259,431
Waterside House Londonderry	9,006	11,165	10,273
Mallusk	1,214,946	1,318,565	1,468,831
Newry	1,147,467	1,185,007	1,337,088
Newtownards	1,646,329	1,816,311	2,018,838
Omagh	849,849	786,516	910,052
HQ Belfast	6,398,549	6,427,917	7,438,534
Enforcement	1,382,916	1,428,034	1,545,348
	24,246,068	26,108,373	28,398,582

DVA Licensing Expenditure	2005/06	2006/7	2007/08
Location	£	£	£
Coleraine	15,269,592	16,260,178	15,334,470
Armagh	212,758	219,959	235,131
Ballymena	239,747	236,089	239,179
Enniskillen	109,064	110,209	117,445
Londonderry	127,138	168,267	169,287
Omagh	150,309	149,832	173,684
Downpatrick	171,228	165,476	177,469
Belfast - Vehicle Licensing	444,198	368,643	405,650
Belfast - Road Transport Licensing	1,786,927	1,626,201	1,711,807
	18,510,961	19,304,854	18,564,122

Shortfall in Rates Revenue

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment if he is aware of the shortfall in rates revenue being experienced by Armagh City and District Council; and if he will discuss remedial options, such as transitional relief, with council officials. (AQW 461/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Rating policy is a matter for the Department of Finance and Personnel. I understand that the Minister for that Department will address your concerns.

Increase in Levels of Council Expenditure

Mr Savage asked the Minister of the Environment what recommendations his Department will make to the new councils, given that they will be assuming responsibility for the increase in expenditure of existing councils investing in a number of capital and refurbishment programmes, resulting in annual loan charges. (AQW 466/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Matters relating to assets and liabilities of existing councils will be addressed by the Policy Development Panel responsible for finance and estates and the Strategic Leadership Board. The agreed way forward will be contained in primary legislation and in detailed guidance for councils.

Delivery of PfG and PSA Commitments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment what progress his Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 469/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Department of the Environment is actively progressing delivery of its Programme for Government (PfG) and Public Service Agreement (PSA) commitments.

The first monitoring round of Year 1 of the PfG has highlighted progress to date including:

- A certificate of professional competence scheme for bus drivers launched on 10 September 2008 with the launch for lorry drivers on target to take place before the end of September 2009;
- Positive progress on the targets set for the reduction in the number of people and children killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions;
- Ongoing consultation with Assembly Statutory Committees prior to producing a Draft River Basin Management Plan for public consultation;

- Air quality objectives achieved at all government monitoring sites for 2007 (still to be achieved at council monitoring sites in Belfast, Newtownabbey and Newry for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter);
- Ongoing development and delivery of departmental biodiversity implementation plans and the establishment of challenging targets to declare 25 new Areas of Special Scientific Interest during 2008/2009 and 75 during 2008/2011;
- Draft or adopted development plans produced covering almost 60% of the region. A Judicial challenge has delayed the production of a further 3 draft development plans which would increase coverage to 90% of the region;
- Detailed policy proposals for the reform of the planning process currently being prepared for public consultation in 2008/2009; and
- Implementation structures and delivery mechanisms in place and delivery programme on target for the 11 new councils with their new functions, to become operational in 2011. Preparation of three Bills to give effect to the Executive's decision to transfer powers to local government.

My Department will face challenges in achieving some PfG targets particularly the implementation of the NICS wide Shared Corporate Services and Office Estate Services.

PAD Process

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the pre-application discussion process for planning applications relating to projects deemed to be of strategic importance.

(AQW 501/09)

The Minister of the Environment: While pre-application discussions (PADs) were formally introduced in December 2007 the approach had been used before this in some of the larger applications. One application which benefited from the approach was that for a new Public Record Office which was determined within 6 months.

One proposal has completed the formal PAD process, which took approximately 3 months, the application was submitted in June 2008. The Strategic Projects Division is confident that it will be processed within 6 months, in accordance with the Programme for Government target.

At present there are 18 proposals at PAD stage.

Clearly, if PADs is to be a success in terms of speeding up the process there are obligations on everyone involved in the planning process, including

agents, through a mutual commitment to improve the quality of applications and maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory process quickly. However, the early indications are very positive.

Dog Fouling

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to enable councils to increase the penalties for dog fouling to increase pressure on irresponsible dog owners.

(AQW 505/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Plans for increased fines for dog fouling have been considered by my officials under the Clean Neighbourhoods agenda. The Clean Neighbourhoods agenda, once implemented, will extend and strengthen existing legislative powers and create new additional powers for District Councils to enable them to deal more effectively with a wide range of local environmental quality issues, including dog fouling.

The timescale for progressing the Clean Neighbourhoods agenda is, however, subject to competing priorities and resource constraints facing my Department. I am also conscious of the impact on Councils of the Review of Public Administration and our intention to implement the agreed structural reform package by 2011. In the circumstances I have decided to defer any further consideration of the Clean Neighbourhoods agenda and associated new primary

legislation until 2011 by which time the structural reform package should be implemented and to allow my officials, in the meantime, to concentrate on higher priority environmental issues.

Planning Policy

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that planning policy is in line with the ever changing agriculture industry, particularly in relation to diversification into tourism projects. (AQW 526/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Revised draft PPS14 brings planning policy into line with current agricultural policies on farm diversification. I hope the Executive will consider the revised draft at the earliest opportunity. If there is no agreement, I will shelve the revised draft and we will live with the existing policy. This would mean residential development in rural areas continuing to be hampered by restrictive planning policy, and planning policy on farm diversification continuing to lag behind rural development policies.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions was achieved in the (i) energy; (ii) transport; (iii) housing; (iv) agriculture; and (v) public sectors, between May 2007 and May 2008.

(AQW 560/09)

The Minister of the Environment: There are no statistics available to assess the percentage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between May 2007 and May 2008. The latest information available is based on calendar years and compares 2006 with 1990. The relevant 'Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland' is available at <http://www.naei.org.uk/reports.php>.

Newtownards Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how many MOT and PSV inspections have been carried out in Newtownards Driver and Vehicle Agency in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 571/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Agency conducts MOT tests on private cars, motorcycles and large passenger carrying vehicles. Public Service Vehicle (PSV) tests are carried out on taxis and buses.

Detail of the number of MOT, PSV and goods vehicle tests carried out in the years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08 at the Newtownards Test Centre is included in the following table.

Financial Year	Number of MOT tests	Number of PSV tests	Number of goods vehicle tests
2005/06	63,971	1,231	4,727
2006/07	71,653	1,199	5,183
2007/08	72,747	1,296	5,419

Allotments

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to list how many local authorities provide land for the provision of allotments; and to detail the amounts of land that are provided by each district council area for this purpose.

(AQW 575/09)

The Minister of the Environment: District councils have a discretionary power in the Allotments Act (Northern Ireland) 1932 to provide allotments for use by residents in their districts.

My Department does not hold central records of councils that provide allotments or the amounts of land provided by those councils for that purpose. My Department will however contact councils to request this information and I will write to you in due course.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the income of each Driver and Vehicle Agency centre, in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 576/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The following tables provide the detail of Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) income for each of the last 3 years.

DVA TESTING – INCOME

	2005/06	2006/7	2007/08
Location	£	£	£
Armagh	894,567	993,400	1,074,967
Ballymena	1,794,455	2,144,868	2,309,392
Belfast Dill Road Belfast	2,736,658	3,318,877	3,254,077
Coleraine	1,711,643	1,836,103	1,952,873
Cookstown	1,677,138	1,843,259	1,823,009
Craigavon	1,304,549	1,552,967	1,743,251
Downpatrick	1,051,245	1,166,286	1,302,244
Enniskillen	1,081,929	1,204,345	1,314,824
Larne	1,137,762	1,272,227	1,388,869
Lisburn	1,435,648	1,608,255	1,743,296
Londonderry	1,649,759	2,027,858	2,182,087
Waterside House, Londonderry Mallusk	1,807,894	2,192,163	1,976,902
Newry	1,704,062	1,953,111	1,981,414
Newtownards	2,428,724	2,965,006	2,996,051
Omagh	1,068,164	1,131,680	1,207,150
HQ Belfast	673,992	403,055	753,810
Enforcement	1,382,916	1,428,034	1,545,348
	25,541,105	29,041,494	30,549,564

Income for Driving Test locations at Dill Road, Belfast and Waterside House, Londonderry are included in the totals for Belfast and Londonderry.

DVA LICENSING – INCOME

DVA Licensing Local Offices mainly collect Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). This is accounted for by DVLA in the VED Account and is not recorded by individual location. The total amount of VED collected in Northern Ireland in the last three years was:

	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
VED (collected by Vehicle Licensing)	75,588,220	76,463,602	79,417,814
VED (collected by Car Dealers)	5,876,177	6,437,899	7,247,082
VED (collected by Post Offices)	56,272,907	60,516,175	68,388,111
	134,737,304	143,417,676	155,053,007

DVA Licensing income as stated in the Annual Accounts is as follows:

	Note	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Driver Licensing Fees & Other Income	1	4,796,851	4,906,883	5,021,385
DVLA Driver Licensing Subsidy	2	-	397,211	-
Vehicle Licensing Division	3	11,825,917	12,104,290	11,748,929
Taxi Licensing Fees	4	937,810	1,058,805	1,301,415
Road Freight Licensing Fees	4	421,333	422,755	483,390
		17,981,911	18,889,944	18,555,119

Notes:

1. Driver Licensing fees and other income are mainly collected in Coleraine.
2. DVLA Driver Licensing Subsidy is the income received under the Fees Pooling Order from DVLA whereby DVLA subsidise the deficit on the drivers fee account.
3. Vehicle Licensing Division income is the amount charged to DVLA to cover the total costs of the Vehicle Licensing Division (excluding depreciation and cost of capital).
4. Taxi Licensing fees and Road Freight Licensing fees are collected in Corporation Street, Belfast.

Pollution Incidents in the Quoile River

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to list the pollution incidents in the Quoile River, Downpatrick, that have occurred in the last five years. (AQW 578/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Since 1 January 2004, 14 pollution incidents affecting the Quoile River have been reported to, and verified by, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and its predecessor body - the Environment and Heritage Service.

Details of the date, description and severity of each incident are listed in the attached Appendix.

Date	Description	Severity
18/04/2004	Sewage In Quoile At Downpatrick	Low
21/01/2004	Sludge From Downpatrick Sewage Works Discharging To Quoile	Low
28/06/2005	Sewage Fungus In Stream At Inch Abbey Road, Downpatrick	Low
27/04/2006	Sewage In Waterway At Quoile Road, Downpatrick	Low
29/09/2006	Oil In Protected Marsh At Ballydugan Road, Downpatrick	Low
01/02/2006	Sewage Fungus In Stream At Inch Abbey Road, Downpatrick	Low
12/03/2007	Sewage In Quoile, Inch Abbey Downpatrick	Low
25/04/2007	Oil In Stream At Inch Abbey Road, Downpatrick	Low
28/06/2007	Grey Coloration In Stream At Cathedral View, Downpatrick	Low
18/10/2007	Sewage Overflow At Inch Abbey Road Sewage Pumping Station, Downpatrick	Low
12/05/2008	Raw Sewage Quoile River Downpatrick	Low
29/08/2008	Oil In The Quoile	Low
12/09/2008	Sewage To Quoile At D'patrick Sewage Works	Medium
12/09/2008	Storm Overflow To Quoile At D'patrick Sewage Works	Medium

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what investigations have been carried out on the recent fish kills in the Quoile River, Downpatrick. (AQW 579/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, in conjunction with the Fisheries Conservancy Board and the Agri-Food

and Bio-Sciences Institute, undertook an extensive investigation of the Quoile River following receipt of a report of dead fish on Friday 29 August 2008 at 09:10 hours:-

- the Downpatrick Waste Water Treatment Works was visually checked and sampled and found to be discharging a good quality effluent;
- a discharge of oil in a small tributary of the Quoile was detected. An oil absorbent booming system was used to catch and recover the oil. This is not, however, considered to have caused the fish kill; and
- an extensive chemical sampling programme was undertaken. The results did not identify the presence of any pollutants in the river, however, it did confirm the presence of low levels of oxygen throughout the water column in the Quoile Pondage.

NIEA has concluded that the most likely cause of the recent extensive fishkill was insufficient oxygen levels for the fish in the Quoile River to survive.

Quoile River, Downpatrick

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has carried out research into the purposes for which the lands adjacent to the Quoile River, Downpatrick, were previously used.

(AQW 586/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has not carried out research into the purposes for which the lands adjacent to the Quoile River, Downpatrick, were previously used.

However, NIEA is aware of a disused landfill site at Inch Abbey close to the banks of the Quoile River upstream of Downpatrick Waste Water Treatment Works.

Chief Executive of Craigavon Borough Council

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of the Environment to investigate the legality of the suspension of the Chief Executive of Craigavon Borough Council, to ensure that all proper legal and disciplinary procedures were followed and that the best interests of rate payers were adhered to.[R]

(AQW 594/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has no power to intervene in personnel issues within district councils.

I understand however that Craigavon Borough Council has taken legal advice, and has been assisted by the Local Government Staff Commission, in reaching a decision to suspend the Chief Executive.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when the salaries sacrifice childcare voucher scheme will be available to civil servants.(AQW 10/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): An information launch about the new salary sacrifice scheme will take place during week commencing 22 September. This will help staff to understand the scheme and the implications for them if they decide to participate. The scheme will begin once the new civil service payroll system comes into operation at which point applications to participate in the scheme will be invited and will be processed as quickly as possible.

Introducing a new payroll for 25,000 staff is a very complex and high risk project, and thorough testing is essential to ensure, so far as possible, that the risks will be minimised when it goes live. Our present forecast is that the new payroll will be launched in October, subject to the new payroll system meeting the required criteria for implementation. A final decision on this will be made by 20 October.

Lone Pensioner Allowance

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the reasons why a pensioner from Scrabo Rd in Newtownards has been waiting for a response to his Lone Pensioner Allowance since April and to provide a date when this matter will be resolved; and if he will investigate why staff were not available to handle the numerous telephone calls being made by an elected representative on this matter. (AQW 403/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Lone Pensioner Allowance was introduced on 1st April 2008 and is administered jointly by Land and Property Services and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Land and Property Services had a challenging timeframe in which to develop the necessary IT functionality for this new rate relief, and initial plans for this to 'go live' in May had to be postponed until June after testing revealed some difficulties.

There are still IT issues to be resolved in those cases where applicants are claiming Housing Benefit/ Rate Relief, and also with regard to the electronic transfer of data from the Housing Executive. I have asked officials to ensure that these matters are resolved as quickly as possible.

Land and Property Services would welcome the opportunity to investigate why staff were not available

to handle telephone calls and will contact you to establish more details.

Confederation of British Industry Report

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make a statement on the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) report into public procurement policy; and what action he is taking in response to its recommendations. (AQW 415/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I welcome the findings from the CBI Northern Ireland survey on public procurement – delivering value for money. Central Procurement Directorate within my Department facilitated a workshop on 12 September 2008 at which the CBI NI survey findings were discussed. The workshop was attended by CBI NI representatives and government procurement professionals. Discussions at the workshop resulted in agreed actions aimed at further improving public procurement in Northern Ireland.

Civil Servants

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many civil servants there are at grade 7 and above, broken down by department. (AQW 427/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of civil servants at Grade 7 and above, based on headcount, employed in each of the 11 Government Departments and their agencies is set out in the attached table.

NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS AT GRADE 7 AND ABOVE, IN THE 11 NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR AGENCIES, AT 1 AUGUST 2008

Department	Numbers at Grade 7 and above
DARD	274
DCAL	26
DE	113
DEL	55
DETI	62
DFP	354
DHSSPS	126
DOE	165
DRD	103
DSD	120
OFMDFM	76
Total	1474

Note: Staff on career break are included.

HR Connect

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many officials are engaged off site with the HR Connect contractor; and who is covering for their duties while they are supporting the contractor. (AQW 440/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There are 28 staff from the HRConnect Project Team working predominantly off site in support of the design, build and test of HRConnect. The Project Team staff are a dedicated resource responsible for implementation of the project and therefore do not have other duties assigned to them.

In addition to the Project Team, a variable number of staff from individual Government Departments are periodically involved in designing, observing and testing elements of the HRConnect solution, and reviewing the associated documentation. The time commitment required varies significantly from week to week but is not on a full time basis. These staff continue to perform their normal duties with any cover required organised on a local basis.

Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain why his officials have not processed the Salary Sacrifice scheme by communicating with civil service staff, to ensure that the benefits of the Salary Sacrifice scheme will be sequential with the implementation of the HR Connect Payroll scheme. (AQW 441/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Over the last few months my officials have been working with Employers for Childcare to finalise the documentation for the Salary Sacrifice scheme, including the promotional material.

An information launch about the new salary sacrifice scheme will take place during week commencing 22 September. This is designed to help staff to understand the scheme and the implications for them if they decide to participate. The scheme will begin once the new civil service payroll system comes into operation at which point applications to participate in the scheme will be invited and will be processed as quickly as possible.

Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the repeated delays in the implementation of the new civil service payroll, if he will now make the Salary Sacrifice scheme independent of the payroll

system and implement it without further delay.
(AQW 442/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A Salary Sacrifice scheme has to be operated via a payroll system. The current NICS payroll computer systems could cope with the Salary Sacrifice scheme but this would require considerable manual interventions by payroll staff. At present, the priority for these staff has to be the development and testing of the new payroll system.

Our present forecast is that the new payroll will be launched in October, subject to the new payroll system meeting the required criteria for implementation. A final decision on this will be made by 20 October.

An information campaign about the salary sacrifice scheme will be launched during week commencing 22 September and, once the new payroll system is operational, applications to participate in the scheme will be invited and processed as quickly as possible.

Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will use his Department's funds to compensate civil service staff who have been unable to benefit from the implementation of the Salary Sacrifice scheme for childcare vouchers, as a result of the failure by his Department and the payroll contractor to implement the new payroll system.
(AQW 443/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is no legal or contractual obligation on the NICS to introduce such a scheme nor do staff have a right of access to the scheme. Its introduction is entirely at the discretion of management and, therefore, the issue of compensation does not arise.

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress his Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments.
(AQW 470/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel is making sound progress against its 23 Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and although there has been some minor slippage against some of the targets, the Department remains largely on track to meet its Programme for Government (PfG) and PSA commitments.

To date in Year 1 of the PfG, achievements include:

- Account NI has now been implemented in four Departments. Delays in stabilisation of the system for Wave 1 Departments has resulted in a rescheduling of implementation for subsequent Departments and

a programme plan is in place to complete implementation by the revised target date of 31 July 2009.

- The first waves of HR Connect services were introduced in 2007 and early 2008. It is anticipated that all services will be operational by the end of 2008.
- The Department of Education (DE) migrated to the ICT Shared Services Centre, IT Assist, in April 2008. IT Assist now provides services to DFP, DRD, Roads Service, DCAL, PRONI, DOE, OFMDFM, DETI and DE. The project remains on track for remaining Departments to be migrated by April 2009.
- Network NI is now operational in Phase 1, 2 and 3 sites, a total of 114 sites in all. The project remains on track for completion by 30 September 2009.
- Records NI is now available to 15,500 NICS staff, with over 2.5 million records stored in the TRIM system. The project will be closed at the final Project Board in September 2008, at which time Records NI will move to a sustainable operational line of business service.
- The contract for NI Direct Phase 1 telephony services was awarded to Steria in July 2008. OFCOM has confirmed that NI Direct may use 101 as its short digit number, work is underway to procure the supporting telecoms service and progress to establish the selected services is ahead of schedule.
- The BRAVO e-sourcing system went live on 6 May 2008, providing easier access to all Central Procurement Directorate tender opportunities.
- The NICS Diversity and Equality Plan 2008-11 has been approved and will be published on the NICS intranet in the coming weeks.

Progress against 3 of the targets in the PfG for which DFP is responsible has taken a little longer than planned:

- Bids for Workplace 2010 were received in June 2008 and assessment is ongoing. This is a complex procurement and contract signature is not anticipated before the end of March 2009.
- Whilst the target to establish a citizen facing theme based website by March 2009 will be met, the consolidation of 70% of NICS Departmental and Agency websites by March 2009 will not be achieved due to recent problems with the security of some Departmental websites. This work will resume following a security review, penetration testing and any remedial work required.
- The target to revise and publish a new Learning and Development Strategy for the Senior Civil Service by June 2008 was not met. A draft strategy has been completed and was considered by the Selection and Development Permanent Secretaries sub-group on 16 September 2008

Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what scoping his officials have carried out with civil servants in relation to the uptake of the Salary Sacrifice scheme; and if he will communicate the necessary information to civil servants to allow the immediate implementation of the scheme.

(AQW 510/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is estimated that around 830 (3%) NICS staff will participate in the Salary Sacrifice scheme. This is based on advice from childcare voucher providers that between 3-5% of staff in any organisation will take vouchers. However, this is largely based on experience in Great Britain where there is possibly greater reliance on registered childcare than in Northern Ireland.

An information launch about the salary sacrifice scheme took place during week commencing 22 September and, once the new payroll system is operational, applications to participate in the scheme will be invited and processed as quickly as possible. Our present forecast is that the new payroll will be launched in October, subject to the new payroll system meeting the required criteria for implementation. A final decision on this will be made by 20 October.

Civil Servants

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why there is a continued delay in the introduction of (i) Childcare Vouchers and (ii) the Salary Sacrifice scheme, for civil servants. (AQW 538/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Northern Ireland Civil Service Salary Sacrifice childcare voucher scheme will be implemented following the introduction of the new civil service payroll system.

Introducing a new payroll for 25,000 staff is a very complex and high risk project, and thorough testing is essential to ensure, so far as possible, that the risks will be minimised when it goes live. Our present forecast is that the new payroll will be launched in October, subject to the new payroll system meeting the required criteria for implementation. A final decision on this will be made by 20 October.

An information campaign about the salary sacrifice scheme will be launched during week commencing 22 September and, once the new payroll system is operational, applications to participate in the scheme will be invited and processed as quickly as possible.

Steps to Work Programme

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why there is no appeals process for candidates applying for the Steps to Work contract. (AQW 543/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The procurement of contracts for the Steps to Work Programme was managed by Central Procurement Directorate which, as part of its Customer & Supplier Charter, has a formal complaints procedure which provides for an internal investigation of procurement processes where concerns are expressed.

Central Procurement Directorate's formal complaints procedure is a two stage process. The first stage is an investigation by the Divisional Director responsible for the area of work in which the complaint has arisen. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Divisional Director's response, the complainant can ask for the matter to proceed to stage two and the second investigation will be carried out by the Director of Central Procurement Directorate. Finally should the complainant remain dissatisfied, having gone through the two stages, they may ask their MLA to refer their complaint to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman for investigation.

Ministry of Defence Land in Lisanelly

Mr Doherty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department has received a business case from the Minister of Education for an educational campus on vacated Ministry of Defence land in Lisanelly, Omagh; and if so, to provide an update on the progress of the business case. (AQW 554/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not yet received a business case from the Minister of Education for the development of an educational campus on the Lisanelly site in Omagh.

Intractable Epilepsy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many infant deaths due to intractable epilepsy have been recorded in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 781/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the last 5 years (2003-2007^P) there was one infant death registered, in 2007, where epilepsy¹ was recorded as the underlying, or main, cause of death. However, the cause of death was not recorded as intractable epilepsy.

During the same time period, there were five further infant deaths where epilepsy¹ was mentioned on the death certificate as a secondary cause of death.

On two of these five occasions, intractable epilepsy was recorded as a secondary cause of death.

^p Data for the year 2007 is provisional.

¹ International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code G40.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

New Fire Station for Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when Ballymena will be provided with a new Fire Station. (AQW 209/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to Mr Mervyn Storey on 27 May 2008 (AQW 7000/2008).

Ballymena Fire Station

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there will be cuts in the number of whole-time fire-fighters based at Ballymena Fire Station. (AQW 211/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I indicated in my written answer to you in December 2007 (AQW2555/08), the issue of staffing levels at fire stations across Northern Ireland is a matter for the Chief Fire Officer of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. Any adjustments in staffing are taken in the context of ongoing assessment of risk and other relevant factors.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the efficiency savings plan for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 213/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed year one efficiency proposals but no decisions have been made in relation to years two and three. It is my intention to bring these proposals to the Health Committee in the near future.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the efficiency savings plan for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 215/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed year one efficiency proposals but no decisions have been made in relation to years two and three. It is my intention to bring these proposals to the Health Committee in the near future.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the efficiency savings plan for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 216/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed year one efficiency proposals but no decisions have been made in relation to years two and three. It is my intention to bring these proposals to the Health Committee in the near future.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the efficiency savings plan for the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 217/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed year one efficiency proposals but no decisions have been made in relation to years two and three. It is my intention to bring these proposals to the Health Committee in the near future.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the efficiency savings plan for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 218/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have agreed year one efficiency proposals but no decisions have been made in relation to years two and three. It is my intention to bring these proposals to the Health Committee in the near future.

Maternity Services

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action is being taken

to recruit maternity staff to Craigavon Area Hospital to facilitate the expansion of maternity services to enable 300 additional births each year. (AQW 229/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst specific recruitment and retention issues are a matter for the Health and Social Care trusts, the Southern Trust has assured me of a very positive response to recent advertisements in the press for Band 5/6 midwives. The Trust is confident that, following the interview process, the vacancies identified for staff midwives will be filled.

Social Workers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the procedures in place to ensure that social workers dismissed and discredited in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, cannot re-establish themselves in either jurisdiction. (AQW 231/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are a number of safeguards to ensure social workers from another jurisdiction are prevented from working with children or vulnerable adults in Northern Ireland (NI) if deemed unsuitable. These include:

- all practising social workers in Northern Ireland are subject to registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC), the regulatory body for the social care workforce (www.niscc.info);
- anyone seeking employment in a care or regulated position in NI should not be appointed without written references and a criminal record check by Access NI (www.accessni.gov.uk), which includes a check against the statutory Disqualification from working with Children and Vulnerable Adults List; and
- where an application for a criminal record check indicates that someone has lived in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) within the past 5 years, PSNI will, as part of normal cross-border policing arrangements, seek relevant information from An Garda Síochána on that applicant.

Decisions regarding the employment of social workers in the ROI are outside the remit of DHSSPS. However, as part of the North South Ministerial Council arrangements, the DHSSPS is working with the Department of Health and Children (ROI) to identify areas where both jurisdictions can work more closely together, including the vetting of those wishing to work with children and the potential for mutual exchange of information for this purpose.

A system of statutory registration for health and social care professionals was established in the ROI

in 2007. An information sharing protocol will be put in place between the NISCC and this body when registration of social workers in the ROI goes live.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have applied and been refused for Health Service dentists in the Ards and Strangford areas, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 239/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Statistics on the number of people who have applied and been refused for Health Service dentists in the Ards and Strangford areas in each of the last 3 years are not available.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients are registered with Health Service dentists in (i) Ards; and (ii) Strangford. (AQW 264/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- There were 38,364 patients living in the Ards District Council area that were registered to a Health Service dentist at September 2008.
- There were 53,316 patients living in the Strangford Parliamentary Constituency area that were registered to a Health Service dentist at September 2008.

Source: Central Services Agency

AccessNI

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve the speed of the Protection of Vulnerable Adult (POVA) and the Protection of Children Act (POCA) process, for those employed to look after children in nurseries and playgroups. (AQW 265/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The process for carrying out pre-employment checks on those working with children and vulnerable adults changed on 1 April 2008, with the establishment of a new Northern Ireland Criminal History Disclosure Body, AccessNI. The operation of AccessNI is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office.

In August 2008, I acted to assist employers facing difficulties caused by AccessNI delays by allowing

a temporary suspension of the requirement to have a completed enhanced check, subject to rigorous application of a range of measures that are feasible in the present time. In some areas this required an amendment to legislation requiring enhanced disclosure certificates from AccessNI. Legislative amendment was restricted to those areas of health and social care impacted most by AccessNI delays, based on evidence obtained by my department. As a result, the majority of employers in health and social care were enabled to employ individuals, pending receipt of an enhanced disclosure from AccessNI and subject to a number of conditions being satisfied. On the advice of the Department of Education, which carries policy responsibility for early years, this arrangement did not extend to those working in nurseries and playgroups, however, this position will be kept under review.

I have asked my officials to closely monitor developments. This is being done in cooperation with Department of Education officials and the Regional Quality and Improvement Authority. In addition, I have sought assurances from Minister Paul Goggins that AccessNI will return to full service at the earliest opportunity.

Carers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to what level of (i) social work; and (ii) medical expertise, do carers fall short of. (AQW 273/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Carers provide valuable support to family members or friends who may not be able to manage without this help because of frailty, illness or disability. This support often takes the form of social or personal care but carers are not required to have any formal levels of medical or social work expertise. A carer may however require training to help them carry out their role, for example, training in lifting and bathing or the use of aids and equipment, and if this is the case Health and Social Care Trusts are responsible for assessing the carer's training needs and ensuring that those agreed needs are met.

Registered Pre-School Playgroups

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many registered pre-school playgroups there are per head of population, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 276/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available in the format that you have requested.

Ambulance Fleets

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the size of the ambulance fleet for the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 288/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that fleet data are maintained on the basis of its operational divisions which are aligned with Health and Social Services Board areas. The numbers of A&E ambulances assigned to each Board area are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board area	A&E ambulances
Eastern	42
Northern	36
Southern	28
Western	26

Ambulance Fleets

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the size of the ambulance fleet for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 289/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that fleet data are maintained on the basis of its operational divisions which are aligned with Health and Social Services Board areas. The numbers of A&E ambulances assigned to each Board area are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board area	A&E ambulances
Eastern	42
Northern	36
Southern	28
Western	26

Ambulance Fleets

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the size of the

ambulance fleet for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 290/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that fleet data are maintained on the basis of its operational divisions which are aligned with Health and Social Services Board areas. The numbers of A&E ambulances assigned to each Board area are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board area	A&E ambulances
Eastern	42
Northern	36
Southern	28
Western	26

Ambulance Fleets

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the size of the ambulance fleet for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 291/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that fleet data are maintained on the basis of its operational divisions which are aligned with Health and Social Services Board areas. The numbers of A&E ambulances assigned to each Board area are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board area	A&E ambulances
Eastern	42
Northern	36
Southern	28
Western	26

Ambulance Fleets

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the size of the ambulance fleet for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 292/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) has advised me that fleet data are maintained on the basis of its operational divisions which are aligned with Health and Social Services

Board areas. The numbers of A&E ambulances assigned to each Board area are as follows:

Health and Social Services Board area	A&E ambulances
Eastern	42
Northern	36
Southern	28
Western	26

Missing Medical Records

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many medical records have gone missing in each of the last 3 years, broken down by Health and Social Services Board; and what action he is taking to address this. (AQW 318/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested.

Breast Cancer

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with breast cancer in the (i) Ards; and (ii) Strangford areas, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 320/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the incidence of breast cancer (ICD-10 C50) in the Ards and Strangford areas is detailed in the tables below.

(I) TABLE 1: INCIDENCE OF BREAST CANCER (ICD-10 C50) IN ARDS LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT 2003-05

Year	Incidence
2003	43
2004	58
2005	47

Notes:

1.1% of these cancers could not be assigned to a patient's resident Local Government District.

(II) TABLE 2: INCIDENCE OF BREAST CANCER (ICD-10 C50) IN STRANGFORD PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY AREA 2003-05

Year	Incidence
2003	50
2004	79

Year	Incidence
2005	60

Notes:

1.1% of these cancers could not be assigned to a patient's Parliamentary Constituency of residence.

This information was provided by Northern Ireland Cancer Registry and is the most up-to-date available.

Availability of Herceptin

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the herceptin drug is available to all patients that need it. (AQW 321/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Treatment with the cancer drug Herceptin (trastuzumab) is available to all those women in Northern Ireland diagnosed with breast cancer who are found to be clinically suitable for the drug.

Ambulance Cover in the Ards Borough

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to ensure that ambulance cover in the Ards Borough will not be affected by restrictions in neighbouring areas. (AQW 322/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have secured an additional £12.1m in revenue funding to be invested in ambulance service

development over the CSR period to enhance provision and response. Additionally, £14.5m capital funding will be made available during this period, of which NIAS has earmarked £10.4m for fleet replacement.

The Ambulance Service proposals for efficiency savings and the planned programme of investment in ambulance services during the CSR period will deliver a net increase in paramedic cover across Northern Ireland. These proposals will be supplemented by measures to better manage demand for ambulance transportation to hospital by offering appropriate alternative care pathways to patients with less clinically urgent conditions.

What this will mean for the people of Ards Borough and elsewhere in Northern Ireland is that there will be more ambulance vehicles on the road capable of responding promptly to emergencies.

Women's Groups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what grants have been issued to Women's Groups from (i) Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) his Department, over the last 2 years in the North Down area. (AQW 341/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following grants set out in the attached Annex A have been issued to Women's Groups in the North Down area by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, the Eastern Board and my Department over the last two years.

ANNEX A

Organisation	Board Funding		Trust Funding		Departmental Core and Project Funding		Children's Fund	
	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
North Down & Ards Women's Aid	£8,575	£18,116	£36,221	£37,127	-	-	£12,242	£12,498
Women's Resource Development Agency (North Down & Ards)	£900	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Women's Groups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what grants have been issued to Women's Groups from (i) Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) his Department, over the last 2 years in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 342/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

The following grants set out in the attached Annex A have been awarded to Women's Groups in the Western Health and Social Care Trust Area from the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Western Health and Social Services Board and my Department.

ANNEX A

Organisation	Board Funding		Trust Funding		Departmental Core and Project Funding		Departmental Children's Fund	
	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
Derry Well Woman	£28,300	£17,608	£100,060	£88,856	-	-	-	-
Omagh Women's Area Network	£5,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Roe Valley Women's Area Network	£4,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Foyle Women' Aid	-	£5,107	£62,340	£24,414	-	-	-	-
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group	-	-	-	£500	-	-	-	-
Women's Aid Fermanagh	-	-	£10,000	£24,250	-	-	£48,461	£49,673
Women's Aid Omagh	-	£6,950	£30,435	£35,916	-	-	-	-
Women's Aid	-	£3,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Waterside Women's Centre	-	-	£2,935	-	-	-	-	-
Derry Women's Centre	-	-	-	-	-	-	£46,344	£47,503

Women's Groups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what grants have been issued to Women's Groups from (i) Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) his Department, over the last 2 years in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 343/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following grants set out in the attached Annex A have been issued to Women's Groups in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, the Northern Board and my Department over the last two years.

ANNEX A

Organisation	Board Funding		Trust Funding		Departmental Core and Project Funding		Departmental Children's Fund	
	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
Triangle Women's Association	-	-	£46,285	£231,404	-	-	-	-
Women's Aid Cookstown	-	-	£41,717	£42,070	-	-	-	-
Women's Aid Ballymena	-	-	£56,072	£57,283	-	-	-	-
Women's Aid Coleraine	-	-	£47,535	£48,723	-	-	-	-
Causeway Women's Aid	£29,873	-	-	-	-	-	£67,939	£69,637
Women's Aid (Antrim, Ballymena, Larne, Coleraine, Newtownabbey)	£89,086	£15,578	-	-	-	-	£36,076	£36,977
Cookstown District Women's Group	£24,750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rasharkin Women's Group	£36,033	£73,312	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dunclug Partnership Group (Well Woman Project)	£22,984	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mid Ulster Women's Network	-	£18,466	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women's Resource & Development Agency – Community Direct	£4,127	£3,914	-	-	-	-	-	-

Women's Groups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what grants have been issued to Women's Groups from (i) Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) Health and Social Services Boards; and (iii) his Department, over the last 2 years in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 344/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following grants set out in the attached Annex have been issued to Women's Groups in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, the Southern Board and my Department over the last two years.

Organisation	Board Funding		Trust Funding		Departmental Core and Project Funding		Departmental Children's Fund	
	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08	2006/07	2007/08
Women & Family Health Initiative (South Armagh Ltd)	£21,500	£10,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women & Family Health Initiative (LIR House)	£10,000	£10,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Women & Family Health Initiative	£20,000	£30,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chrysalis Women's Centre	£3,750	-	£29,616	£29,616	-	-	-	-
First Steps Women's Group	£1,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Craigavon & Banbridge Women's Aid	-	£5,000	£28,000	£30,000	-	-	-	-
Women Aid Newry	-	£5,000	£33,756	£23,756	-	-	-	-
Newry & Mourne Women Ltd	-	£2,650	-	-	-	-	-	-
SAVAL Ladies Society	-	£500	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greenbank Circle of Women	-	£500	-	-	-	-	-	-
Redrock Ladies Group	-	£729	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cookstown & D'gannon Women's Aid	-	£2,494	£3,000	£5,000	-	-	-	-
Springwell Family Centre	-	-	£61,520	£47,308	-	-	-	-
Armagh Widows	-	-	-	£312	-	-	-	-

Asbestos

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's policy when asbestos is detected in buildings which fall under his responsibility. (AQW 368/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Health and Social Care facilities which fall under my responsibility are required to comply with The Control of Asbestos Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Compliance with health and safety guidance, including that issued by this Department, and legislation in relation to its estate is the responsibility of the Health and Social Care Trusts, and in this regard, each Trust reports annually to my Department on their compliance status across a number of Controls Assurance Standards, including Health and Safety.

The Belfast HSC Trust manage risk of all their estate and buildings until such times as replacement facilities are provided.

Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital and Children's Hospital are meeting health and safety standards, in line with the Department's guidance and legislation. (AQW 369/09)

Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been spent on the Royal Children's Hospital and Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital in each financial year since 2002; and to provide a breakdown of the purpose of this spending. (AQW 370/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Trust advises that from 2002/03 to 2007/08 £2.501m of capital expenditure was incurred with respect to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and £2.656m was spent on the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. In addition £2.155m was spent on the Women and Children's Hospital project at these locations.

These costs represent capital works and equipment (monitoring equipment, scanners etc) for the two sites and do not include ongoing maintenance costs.

Royal Children's Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the cost of women and babies being transported in crisis situations to adult intensive care or the Royal Children's Hospital within the Royal site or to other hospitals in 2006/07 and 2007/08. (AQW 371/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: NIAS does not record activity data on a basis which would allow identification of the cost of transport for this patient group.

Similarly, it is not possible to identify at the source hospital what part of the destination hospital a mother and/or her child are going to, nor is it possible to identify retrospectively staff time spent accompanying a patient on such journeys.

Health and Social Care Reforms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which agencies will remain under the Health and Social Care Reforms. (AQW 383/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is proposed that the following Agencies will remain under the Health and Social Care Reforms:

- NI Practice and Educational Council;
- NI Medical and Dental Training Agency;
- NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency;
- NI Social Care Council;
- Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

In addition, it is also proposed that the Health Estates Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department, will remain within the Department.

Separately to the RPA further consideration is being given to the position of the NI Blood Transfusion Service.

Health and Social Care Reforms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which agencies will cease to exist under the Health and Social Care Reforms. (AQW 384/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is proposed that the following Agencies will cease to exist under the Health and Social Care Reforms:

- Central Services Agency
- the NI Regional Medical Physics Agency
- the Health Promotion Agency

In addition, it is proposed that the Mental Health Commission for Northern Ireland will cease to exist and its functions will be subsumed into the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority.

Health and Social Care Reforms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the cost will be to implement the Health and Social Care Reforms. (AQW 385/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I expect the total cost of implementing HSC structural reforms to be some £98m. The vast majority of this will fund the costs of early retirements and voluntary redundancies that will facilitate the achievement of £53m recurring savings from administration.

Patient Client Council

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what will be the function and cost of the proposed Patient Client Council. (AQW 386/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The proposed Patient and Client Council, which is planned to come into operation from 1 April 2009, subject to Assembly approval, will have the following functions of:

- representing the interests of the public;
- promoting involvement of the public;
- providing assistance (by way of representation or otherwise) to individuals making or intending to make a complaint relating to health and social care;
- promoting the provision of advice and information to the public about the design, commissioning and delivery of health and social care; and
- such other functions as may be prescribed.

The annual running costs remain subject to approval of a final business case.

Commissioning Groups

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the makeup and size will be of the five local commissioning groups. (AQW 387/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is proposed that there will be 17 members of each of the five Local Commissioning Groups and each will be made up as follows:-

- 4 General Medical Practitioners,
- 1 pharmacist,
- 1 dentist,
- 4 elected local representatives,
- 2 social care professionals,
- 1 nurse,
- 1 public health medicine professional,
- 1 Allied Health Professional, and
- 2 Health & Social Care related voluntary sector representatives.

Health Service Dentists

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service dentists are in East Londonderry and Foyle constituencies. (AQW 388/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) At 15 September 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there are 42 and 46 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the East Londonderry parliamentary constituency and Foyle parliamentary constituency respectively².
- (ii) Information is not available for AQW 390/09.

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only; figures exclude assistants and vocational dental practitioners.
2. Based on location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Health Service Dentists

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dentists

have vacancies for Health Service patients in the East Londonderry and Foyle constituencies. (AQW 390/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) At 15 September 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there are 42 and 46 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the East Londonderry parliamentary constituency and Foyle parliamentary constituency respectively².
- (ii) Information is not available for AQW 390/09.

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only; figures exclude assistants and vocational dental practitioners.
2. Based on location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Osteoporosis

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in each Health and Social Care Trust have been diagnosed with osteoporosis. (AQW 400/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people diagnosed with osteoporosis in each Health and Social Care Trust is not available.

Volunteer Groups Assisting Those Affected by Suicide

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to support volunteer groups who provide assistance to those affected by the loss of people through suicide. (AQW 404/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the current financial year, a total £2.0m from the overall suicide prevention strategy budget of £3.2m has been allocated to the four Health and Social Services Boards specifically for use in supporting local communities with the development of suicide prevention and bereavement support initiatives.

Suicide Awareness

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been given to assist suicide awareness and help groups in 2006 and 2007, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 405/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Services Boards have advised that the information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency for 2006 or 2007.

The table below provides a breakdown of suicide prevention community support funding allocated to Health and Social Services Boards in the financial years 2006/07 and 2007/08. This funding was used to support local communities with the development of initiatives that will help achieve a reduction in the levels of suicide and self-harm.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT PACKAGE FUNDING

Board Area	Funding 2006/07 (£)	Funding 2007/08 (£)
Eastern	534,511	772,525
Northern	169,848	363,960
Southern	129,591	389,785
Western	120,050	273,730

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress his Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 471/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am absolutely committed to ensuring the timely and effective delivery of my Department's PSA commitments. Robust delivery plans are in place or are being finalised for all targets, and progress is being overseen by a dedicated Service Delivery Unit within the Department.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances in the Western Health and Social Care Trust have broken down while on duty in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 488/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

NIAS is a regional service and in the event of vehicle non-starts or breakdowns will deploy reserve vehicles held in ambulance stations or the nearest available operational ambulance as appropriate.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much investment his Department has put into ambulance provision in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 490/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service provides a regional service which is funded on a capitation basis by the four Health and Social Services Boards. The funding provided by the Western Health and Social Services Board is shown in the table below.

Year	Funding (£million)*
2004/05	£5.47m
2005/06	£6.025m
2006/07	£8.694m
2007/08	£8.707m
2008/09	£10.226m

* Figures do not include capital charges.

Disabling Neurological Conditions

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve social care services for people with multiple sclerosis and other disabling neurological conditions. (AQW 525/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Multiple Sclerosis (MS) sufferers and people with other neurological conditions benefit from the Physical and Sensory Disability Programme of Care and have access to a range of services including respite, therapy services, day-care services and wheelchair services; all of which are based on a clinical assessment of their needs. Through the Comprehensive Spending Review process, additional respite placements were secured for people with a physical and sensory disability, including MS and other neurological conditions, which will realise 200 additional placements by the end of April 2011.

In addition, £7m is available on a regional basis to allow patients with MS and other neurological diseases to access disease modifying drug therapies. Since March 2008, in line with my Priority for Action target, no patient waits longer than 13 weeks to access treatment.

Nursing Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nursing vacancies there are in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. (AQW 533/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of Nursing Vacancies by Health and Social Care Trust as at 31st March 2008 is given in the tables below.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF CURRENT NURSING VACANCIES BY HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST AS AT 31ST MARCH 2008.

Health & Social Care Trust	Qualified Nursing Staff		Nurse Support Staff		All Nursing Staff	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	155	139.4	105	100.2	260	239.6
Northern	41	40.2	19	18.3	60	58.5
South Eastern	20	17.0	9	7.8	29	24.8
Southern	51	46.3	14	12.9	65	59.2
Western	28	27.5	5	5.0	33	32.5
Other Organisations	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	295	270.3	152	144.2	447	414.5

Source: NI Health and Social Care Organisations.

Notes:

1. A current vacancy is an unoccupied post, which at 31st March 2008 was vacant and which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
2. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF LONG-TERM NURSING VACANCIES BY HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST AS AT 31ST MARCH 2008.

Health & Social Care Trust	Qualified Nursing Staff		Nurse Support Staff		All Nursing Staff	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	48	46.9	46	42.8	94	89.7
Northern	1	0.7	0	0.0	1	0.7
South Eastern	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Southern	25	21.8	7	6.8	32	28.6
Western	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other Organisations	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	74	69.4	53	49.6	127	119.0

Source: NI Health and Social Care Organisations.

Notes:

1. A long-term vacancy is an unoccupied post, which at 31st March 2008 had been vacant for three months or more (was vacant prior to 31st December 2007) and which the organisation was actively trying to fill. Long-term vacancies are a sub-set of current vacancies.
2. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent

Doctor Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many vacancies there currently are for doctors in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas. (AQW 534/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of Medical Vacancies by Health and Social Care Trust as at 31st March 2008 is given in the following table.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF MEDICAL VACANCIES BY HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST AS AT 31ST MARCH 2008.

Health & Social Care Trust	Current Medical Staff Vacancies		Long-Term Medical Staff Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Belfast	34	33.5	14	14.0
Northern	4	2.4	0	0.0
South Eastern	12	12.0	4	4.0

Health & Social Care Trust	Current Medical Staff Vacancies		Long-Term Medical Staff Vacancies	
	Headcount	WTE	Headcount	WTE
Southern	22	22.0	5	5.0
Western	10	10.0	8	8.0
Other Organisations	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	82	79.9	31	31.0

Source: NI Health and Social Care Organisations.

Notes:

1. A current vacancy is an unoccupied post, which at 31st March 2008 was vacant and which the organisation was actively trying to fill.
2. A long-term vacancy is an unoccupied post, which at 31st March 2008 had been vacant for three months or more (was vacant prior to 31st December 2007) and which the organisation was actively trying to fill. Long-term vacancies are a sub-set of current vacancies.
3. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent
4. Figures include vacancies for medical staff at all grades including Consultant, Staff Grade, Specialist Registrar, Senior House Officer and Other grades.

Dental Practices

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of privately registered dental practices in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 544/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available.

Emergency Response Times in Fermanagh and West Tyrone

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's strategy for improving emergency ambulance response times in West Tyrone. (AQW 547/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I announced in August a range of proposals to improve emergency response times in Fermanagh and West Tyrone. These include a major £3 million investment over the next three years to provide additional ambulance cover in the Omagh and Enniskillen areas; the enhancement of ambulance cover in the Castlederg area; and the roll out of

paramedic led thrombolysis which can be life saving for people suffering heart attacks.

In the past two years I have also made available an additional £0.5 million to fund an additional A&E crew, an intermediate care vehicle and two rapid response vehicles as well as establishing a deployment point at Fintona.

This significant investment highlights my determination to continue to put patients first and represents my commitment to provide a modern high performance ambulance service fit for the 21st century whilst targeting the particular needs of rural areas.

Development of Primary and Community Care Infrastructure

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department will assign urgent priority status to the development of health and care centres in Carrickmore and Fintona. (AQW 549/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The development of primary and community care infrastructure, along with the all other Trust priorities across Northern Ireland, will be given due consideration in the context of funding constraints.

I received a total of £3.3bn over the 10 years of the Investment Strategy 2008, against a bid of £5.7bn, with just over £700m in the CSR. A major element of this investment has been contractually committed, reducing further the availability of capital resources needed to modernise our healthcare infrastructure after many years of under investment.

This funding is not enough to meet all of the demands within the Health and Social Care estate. As a result I commissioned a review of capital investment priorities over the remaining years of the Investment Strategy, in particular the years after the CSR period. This review will report to me at the end of September.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of registered Health Service dentists in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 555/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The information requested is provided in the table below.

Health & Social Care Trust	October 2004	September 2005	September 2006	September 2007	September 2008
Belfast	201	205	210	213	225
Northern	188	191	191	192	201
South Eastern	126	135	142	145	152
Southern	137	152	158	160	170
Western	116	121	125	124	126

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners. Dentist numbers are taken from the list of all dentists registered to provide Health Service dentistry.
- Should a dentist work in more than one practice within a Health and Social Care Trust then they have only been counted once within that Trust but if they work across Trusts then they have also been counted once in each relevant one.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many registered Health Service dental practices have left the register in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 556/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The information requested is provided in the table below.

Health & Social Care Trust	1 October 2004 to 1 September 2005	1 October 2005 to 1 September 2006	1 October 2006 to 1 September 2007	1 October 2007 to 1 September 2008
Belfast	1	2	3	4
Northern	0	2	4	2
South Eastern	2	0	0	2
Southern	1	1	2	1
Western	3	3	6	1
Total	7	8	15	10

Source: Central Services Agency

Notes:

- The Central Services Agency does not hold data prior to October 2004.

- The above figures will include dental practices which have relocated, that is, closed but subsequently re-opened, either in the same Trust or a different Trust.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money his Department has spent on dentistry in each of the last 5 years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 557/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: HSC Trusts direct expenditure on dentistry since 2002-03 is set out below. Information is not yet available by Trust for 2007-08.

Trust	2002/2003 £	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £
SHSCT	2,447,965	2,324,032	2,092,216	2,222,542	2,342,124
SEHSCT	4,039,698	4,837,767	5,606,956	6,057,298	6,226,742
NHSCT	2,672,228	2,614,690	2,836,326	3,286,898	3,278,156
WHSCT	3,827,320	3,993,256	3,959,212	4,197,007	4,595,187
BHSCT	3,472,363	3,742,690	4,552,841	4,667,023	5,152,309
Total	16,459,574	17,512,435	19,047,550	20,430,769	21,594,519

Health Service Dentists

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently registered with a Health Service dental practice. (AQW 558/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available by Dental Practice.

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nature of discussions between consultants and directors of the Western Health and Social Care Trust in relation to the status of the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh. (AQW 580/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are regular discussions between clinicians and managers in the Western Trust on a range of issues regarding the provision of services in the Urgent Care Treatment Centre.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether (i) shift hours; and (ii) travelling expenses, have been reduced or removed from medical staff who work in the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh. (AQW 581/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Trust has had difficulties recruiting medical staff to the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre (UCTC) at Tyrone County Hospital. It currently has four vacancies and is dependent on locum cover to provide the service. In order to maintain cover, and make the UCTC a more attractive working environment, the shift patterns have been altered, with 12 hour shifts being replaced by 8 hour shifts.

The eligibility criteria for travelling expenses for medical staff employed by the Trust has not changed.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to give an assurance that the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, will not be downgraded to a nurse-led Minor Injuries Unit. (AQW 582/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to downgrade the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at the Tyrone County Hospital to a Minor Injuries Unit.

I can also assure you that the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre will continue to be a doctor-led service. It will remain under the leadership of medical personnel who will be responsible for the planning, management, and governance of the service.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action (i) his Department; and (ii) the Western Health and Social Care Trust, are taking to recruit and retain medical staff for the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh. (AQW 583/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The recruitment and retention of medical staff, including staff for the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre (UCTC), is a matter for the Western Health and Social Care Trust. Recruitment and retention of appropriately trained and skilled staff required to provide a safe, high quality service at the UCTC remains a priority for the Trust.

In the past year the Trust has undertaken 6 exercises to recruit staff grade doctors and 3 exercises to recruit emergency nurse practitioners, with a 4th currently underway.

Despite repeated efforts to recruit medical staff, a number of posts continue to remain unfilled and the Trust depends on locum medical cover to sustain services at the UCTC.

Treatment for Eating Disorders

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent in (i) 2005-06; (ii) 2006-07; and (iii) 2007-08, on direct patient care for children and young people transferred out of Northern Ireland to receive in-patient treatment for eating disorders, including the cost of travel and accommodation for the patients and their relatives. (AQW 620/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Year	Treatment Costs	Travel/Accommodation
2005/06	£74,000.00	£169,500
2006/07	£260,000	£39,100
2007/08	£324,500	£81,490

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traffic Calming

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if proposals for traffic calming and a new mini-roundabout in Rasharkin have been accepted; and if so, for a timetable for their introduction. (AQW 249/09)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised that officials from my Department's Roads Service discussed a number of possible traffic management and road safety initiatives, for the village of Rasharkin, with you previously. These included both traffic calming measures and a mini roundabout for the junction of Gortahar Road with Finvoy Road.

In relation to the provision of a mini roundabout, at the junction of Gortahar Road with Finvoy Road, new design guidance on the provision of such roundabouts means that this proposed scheme is no longer feasible.

However, a number of other options are being considered for this area of the village, to influence traffic speeds and improve conditions for pedestrians. These include the provision of new footway links, central hatched road markings and pedestrian refuge islands. When complete, these works will assist pedestrians to cross the road and also have a traffic calming effect on vehicles passing through the village. These works are programmed for this financial year.

In addition to the above measures, a scheme to improve road safety at the junction of Church Road with Craigs Road/Bann Road is currently being prepared, with work scheduled to commence towards the latter part of this financial year. The scheme will amend the current crossroads layout to a staggered junction and include the provision of dedicated right turn lanes, for those vehicles making right turns off the main road. This work will be carried out in conjunction with the completion of the resurfacing scheme at Craigs Road, and is viewed as being an important road safety initiative for the village.

Road Ramps

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Regional Development how many impact assessments have been carried out in relation to road ramps during each of the last three years; and to detail the outcomes. (AQW 286/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the construction of road ramps is carried out as part of their Traffic Calming Schemes. Monitoring of scheme impact is included in the overall assessment of Traffic Calming Scheme effectiveness. These impact assessments are carried out three years following scheme completion.

Monitoring reports are not yet available for the period you have requested. However, the table below shows the number of schemes implemented since 1999/2000 and reflects the positive reduction in collisions recorded, where monitoring reports have been completed.

Year	Number of Schemes Implemented	Reduction in Collisions Over Three Years
1999/00	34	111
2000/01	31	104
2001/02	50	122
2002/03	50	176
2003/04	65	Monitoring report not yet available

Year	Number of Schemes Implemented	Reduction in Collisions Over Three Years
2004/05	79	Monitoring report not yet available
2005/06	70	Monitoring report not yet available
2006/07	203 (streets)	Monitoring report not yet available
2007/08	218 (streets)	Monitoring report not yet available

The figures for 1999/00-2005/06 are the number of schemes completed, where a scheme could consist of a number of streets, while the figures for 2006/07 and 2007/08 are for the total number of streets completed.

Road Signs

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost incurred by his Department to replace road signs that have been defaced or stolen in each of the last 5 years, broken down by district council area. (AQW 294/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised me that the cost of replacing road signs that have been vandalised or stolen is not recorded separately.

However, I can advise that on three occasions in the last five years, there have been spates of sign thefts in Roads Service's Western Division. On each occasion the cost has averaged around £3,000 and was reported to the PSNI.

Improving Road Access

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration his Department is giving to improving road access to and from Carney Hill, Holywood, in the interests of public safety. (AQW 308/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) proposes a number of Route Management Strategies for implementation along sections of the trunk road network. These will comprise safety, traffic management and network control measures which will make better use of the existing highway infrastructure and provide a consistent standard of road.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that consultants are currently completing a Route Management Study of the A2 Belfast to Bangor road that includes the issues associated with the private access at Carney Hill. The study will consider a range

of potential junction improvements, from catering for right turning traffic at key junctions, to restricting right turning movements with the provision for u-turning at strategically located junctions.

Roads Service

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service plans to limit the number of under-road works such as laying gas pipes and water mains, to help alleviate congestion on the roads. (AQW 333/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Firstly, in relation to AQW 333/09, I would advise that Utility providers have a statutory right to open roads for the purpose of installing and maintaining their equipment. While my Department's Roads Service has no control over the number of these works, there are powers to regulate them for the purpose of coordination and minimising disruption to road users.

With regard to AQW 337/09, Roads Service carries out regular inspections of utility reinstatements, to ensure that these works are completed in accordance with the technical requirements set out in the statutory reinstatement Code of Practice, "Specification for the reinstatement of openings in roads".

The Code of Practice prescribes the materials to be used and the standards of workmanship to be observed during road reinstatements. Roads Service records the results of inspections and where works are not carried out in accordance with the reinstatement specification, the appropriate utility is notified and instructed to arrange the necessary remedial works.

Sewage

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on Northern Ireland Water's investigation into the release of raw sewage into the Closet River. (AQW 336/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is liaising with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to determine the liabilities for residual pollution in the Closet River arising from the discharges of storm sewage through a combined sewer overflow in the vicinity of Ballynacor Wastewater Treatment Works. This will involve extensive sampling over a period of time. When this is completed, NIW, in conjunction with the NIEA and other responsible stakeholders, will undertake a clean-up of the affected areas.

An upgrade to Ballynacor Wastewater Treatment Works, which is scheduled for completion in early 2009, will significantly reduce discharges to the

Closet River. I have asked NIW to determine if, in the interim, screening could be provided to reduce the debris discharged into the river and this is currently being investigated. NIW's Director of Operations, Phil Barker will write to you direct when the outcome of this investigation is known.

Roads Service

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to give an assurance that Roads Service will assess the quality of road re-instatement to ensure that contractors complete work to an appropriate standard. (AQW 337/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Firstly, in relation to AQW 333/09, I would advise that Utility providers have a statutory right to open roads for the purpose of installing and maintaining their equipment. While my Department's Roads Service has no control over the number of these works, there are powers to regulate them for the purpose of coordination and minimising disruption to road users.

With regard to AQW 337/09, Roads Service carries out regular inspections of utility reinstatements, to ensure that these works are completed in accordance with the technical requirements set out in the statutory reinstatement Code of Practice, "Specification for the reinstatement of openings in roads".

The Code of Practice prescribes the materials to be used and the standards of workmanship to be observed during road reinstatements. Roads Service records the results of inspections and where works are not carried out in accordance with the reinstatement specification, the appropriate utility is notified and instructed to arrange the necessary remedial works.

Investment Plans for Lurgan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's investment plans for the Lurgan area for the next five years; and to provide details of projects to be delivered, including their due dates for completion. (AQW 373/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has developed proposals and obtained Planning Approval for a road link scheme from Malcolm Road to Gilford Road Link, an extension of Millennium Way, in Lurgan.

While plans detailing the land necessary to construct the scheme are being prepared, Roads Service's priority for road improvements is focused on the Strategic Road Network. The link road does not form part of the Strategic Road Network.

However, in the recently published Investment Delivery Plan for Roads over the next 10 years, funds totalling £109 million have been identified "... to complete the Non Strategic Major Improvements incorporating the schemes identified in the Sub-Regional Transport Plan". While there are many competing demands for these substantial, but limited resources, and priorities have still to be determined, I can confirm that the Malcolm Road to Gilford Road extension of Millennium Way will be included among the schemes considered for inclusion in this particular programme of work. At this time Roads Service cannot be certain that the scheme will be delivered within the next five years.

An upgrade of the Knockmore to Lurgan section of the Belfast to Dublin railway line, is due to commence in 2009 and is expected to be completed by 2011. Similarly, these dates are subject to the availability and approval of sufficient funding. Early estimates of the cost of the project are £40 million, although this may increase following the preparation of the economic appraisal when more robust figures are established.

I have been advised by NI Water that over the next five years they plan to invest approximately £34 million in the Lurgan area, including Craigavon and Portadown. The projects, along with their completion dates are listed below:-

Project	Completion Date
Kiln Road, Lurgan Foul Sewer Extension	Early 2009
Castor Bay/Craigavon North Watermain Rehabilitation	Early 2009
Castor Bay/Craigavon South Watermain Rehabilitation	Early 2009
Stanmore Road, Gilford Sewerage Scheme	Early 2009
Moyallen Sewage Pumping Station	Early 2009
Carrick Drive, Banbridge Road, Lurgan Storm Sewer	Late 2009
Ballydougan Service Reservoir Extension	2010/11
Portadown Drainage Area Plan	2011/12
Magheralin Drainage Area Plan	2012/13
Waringstown Drainage Area Plan	2012/13
Lurgan Drainage Area Plan	2013/14
Craigavon Drainage Area Plan	2013/14

Storm Drainage and Foul Water Systems

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to upgrade the storm drainage and foul water systems in Lurgan to meet legal standards. (AQW 374/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that a recently completed Drainage Area Study for the Lurgan district recommended structural and hydraulic capacity upgrading works, together with enhancements of the system, to meet environmental regulatory requirements agreed and approved by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. The upgrading works will provide foul sewage capacity for future zoned development lands identified in the study. Implementation of the Drainage Area Study recommendations is included in NIW's Capital Investment Programme for 2010 to 2013, subject to the availability of funding and competing priorities.

Proposed New Bus Station

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development when a decision will be made on the proposed new bus station in Banbridge. (AQW 380/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The proposal to build a new station in Banbridge is still under consideration as there are complexities surrounding the identification of a suitable site for the station. Discussions about these issues are on-going.

Potential Flooding Risks

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has undertaken a study, along with the Minister of the Environment, to ascertain the potential flooding risks should large scale developments proceed at the Maze site. (AQW 396/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has not undertaken any study to ascertain potential flooding risks at the Maze/Long Kesh site. OFMDFM has responsibility for the overall development of the Maze/Long Kesh site and are therefore responsible for ascertaining any potential flooding risks.

My Department's Roads Service will provide comment (through the Department of the Environment's Planning Service) on roads related issues in respect of any planning application for the site and offer advice on various factors that need to be considered.

Traffic Wardens

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm what discussions have taken place with NCP about an incentive bonus programme for traffic wardens. (AQW 406/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Traffic Attendants are employed by NCP Services Ltd (NSL), which is the private company contracted to provide parking enforcement services. Officials in my Department's Roads Service have advised that they have not been involved in any discussions with NSL about an incentive bonus programme for Traffic Attendants. There are no ticket targets within my Department's contract with NSL.

Bus Service Operators Grant

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of the provisions of the Bus Service Operators Grant for community transport in Great Britain; and what plans he has to extend this to Northern Ireland. (AQW 439/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am aware of the provisions of the Bus Services Operators Grant. This grant is not available to bus operators here and I have no plans to introduce these provisions. The community transport sector here already receives substantial support from my Department.

Roads Schemes and Improvements

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development what expenditure there has been on (i)

new roads schemes and improvements; (ii) repairs to the roads network, since 2001, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 464/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not maintain an analysis of its spending on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, Roads Service does undertake an analysis of its actual spend during the preceding financial year in each Council area.

With regard to new roads schemes and improvements, Roads service's Capital Spend includes Major Capital, Minor Capital, Street Lighting, Car Parks, Transportation Policy, Land and Other Capital.

I should explain that 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.

The table below details Capital spend in each Council area during the last seven years, for which figures are available.

District Council	Capital Spend						
	01-02 £k	02-03 £k	03-04 £k	04-05 £k	05-06 £k	06-07 £k	07-08 £k
Antrim	1,321	9,825	10,066	4,952	1,901	2,801	1,970
Coleraine	1,909	933	1,143	2,555	2,152	1,380	2,090
Limavady	1,997	9,553	3,490	2,615	1,390	1,145	1,450
Moyle	164	213	151	333	383	177	287
Ballymoney	614	354	264	948	3,753	1,223	510
L'derry	2,465	3,009	4,081	9,325	9,165	3,754	8,492
Ballymena	2,076	959	724	1,259	2,343	1,910	6,170
Larne	265	612	1,956	650	1,825	346	1,216
Belfast	12,422	9,875	8,443	20,160	7,246	26,628	6,116
Castlereagh	1,220	506	664	1,551	8,440	835	1,316
Newtownabby	1,597	2,380	4,572	5,694	3,476	1,578	1,965
Carrickfergus	275	392	441	721	1,712	2,566	4,849
North Down	832	947	568	1,310	1,892	1,916	1,770
Lisburn	1,238	1,308	2,209	3,097	3,855	3,673	2,686
Ards	690	2,879	3,685	1,859	1,790	1,725	1,960

District Council	Capital Spend						
	01-02 £k	02-03 £k	03-04 £k	04-05 £k	05-06 £k	06-07 £k	07-08 £k
Armagh	1,069	681	947	2,561	2,270	1,677	3,005
Newry & Mourne	1,652	1,185	7,780	19,922	17,692	62,010	14,863
Banbridge	1,110	1,251	3,845	4,018	2,262	2,221	887
Craigavon	3,798	1,410	1,944	3,973	4,879	1,803	1,658
Down	1,626	528	719	1,721	2,679	1,539	986
Magherafelt	832	661	637	1,964	1,344	966	2,651
Omagh	1,194	1,670	1,366	6,201	7,869	3,455	4,387
Strabane	4,916	7,828	2,056	2,274	3,006	2,067	1,296
Cookstown	619	537	673	948	975	1,078	865
Fermanagh	1,298	895	1,163	3,675	4,137	2,121	4,017
Dungannon	960	419	746	3,556	5,401	15,361	14,235
Totals	48,159	60,810	64,333	107,842	103,837	145,955	91,697

In relation to repairs to the roads network, repair and maintenance expenditure is classed as Resource spend rather than Capital spend. Roads Service expenditure on operation and maintenance, includes Structural Maintenance, Highways Structures, Routine Maintenance, Traffic Maintenance, Winter Maintenance, Street Lighting Maintenance, Car Parking Maintenance and EU schemes.

The table below details Resource spend in each Council area during the last seven years, for which figures are available.

District Council	Operation & Maintenance Spend						
	01-02 £k	02-03 £k	03-04 £k	04-05 £k	05-06 £k	06-07 £k	07-08 £k
Antrim	3,571	3,863	4,976	3,913	4,218	3,251	3,494
Coleraine	3,723	3,740	5,167	3,960	3,960	4,139	4,449
Limavady	2,331	2,636	3,555	3,156	3,327	2,737	3,573
Moyle	1,114	1,448	1,808	1,835	2,111	1,860	2,093
Ballymoney	1,986	2,590	2,768	2,442	2,410	2,283	2,430
L'derry	5,745	7,290	6,067	5,655	5,324	5,281	5,828
Ballymena	4,350	4,011	5,354	5,020	5,493	4,432	4,537
Larne	1,907	2,205	2,432	2,316	2,632	2,754	2,546
Belfast	13,496	14,517	14,895	15,123	15,576	13,730	16,990
Castlereagh	2,519	2,183	2,327	2,179	3,149	3,029	3,552
Newtownabbey	3,011	3,607	3,513	3,676	2,418	3,189	4,576
Carrickfergus	1,846	1,646	1,536	1,325	1,296	1,764	1,971
North Down	2,695	4,068	4,002	2,409	4,160	3,640	3,974
Lisburn	5,141	6,225	7,081	7,369	6,245	5,695	4,948
Ards	3,087	3,216	3,547	3,661	3,706	3,468	5,014
Armagh	4,359	4,542	5,482	5,863	6,011	5,477	7,539
Newry & Mourne	5,456	5,256	7,069	7,567	6,839	5,843	6,212
Banbridge	2,813	3,586	4,008	3,690	4,008	3,841	3,996

District Council	Operation & Maintenance Spend						
	01-02 £k	02-03 £k	03-04 £k	04-05 £k	05-06 £k	06-07 £k	07-08 £k
Craigavon	4,050	4,991	5,258	5,380	5,241	5,217	5,478
Down	4,366	4,641	5,089	5,042	4,914	4,503	4,262
Magherafelt	2,107	2,668	3,449	3,029	3,242	2,612	3,834
Omagh	5,291	5,779	7,048	6,173	6,004	5,587	6,487
Strabane	4,044	4,357	4,829	5,312	4,758	4,746	5,258
Cookstown	2,328	2,600	3,282	3,026	2,605	2,857	2,759
Fermanagh	4,911	5,822	7,461	6,809	6,142	6,737	6,598
Dungannon	4,384	4,985	7,038	5,397	5,395	5,477	5,781
Totals	100,631	112,472	129,041	121,327	121,184	114,149	128,179

Programme for Government

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress his Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments.

(AQW 472/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Department for Regional Development is making good progress in delivering its Programme for Government (PFG) and Public Service Agreement (PSA) commitments.

To date in Year 1 of the PFG construction of the following Strategic Road Improvement schemes is in progress:

- M1/Westlink and M2 Upgrades
- A4 Annaghilla single carriageway realignment with eastbound 2+1 lane
- A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley dualling
- A5 Tullyvar single carriageway realignment with climbing lanes
- A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue dualling
- Four additional grade separated junctions on the A1 between Sprucefield and Loughbrickland
- A4 Henry Street/Sligo Road, Enniskillen

In addition development work on a significant range of projects, which include the following, is progressing well:

- A26/M2 Ballee Road East Link
- A32 Cherrymount Link, Enniskillen
- A32 Dromore – Irvinestown – Enniskillen realignments
- A29 Carland Bridge realignment
- A20 Newtownards Southern Distributor

- A20 Newtownards Frederick Street Link
- A6 Randalstown/M22 – Castledawson
- A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport
- A2 Widening at Greenisland
- A5 Derry to Aughnacloy
- A6 Derry to Dungiven
- A8 Belfast to Larne
- The Department is maintaining the road infrastructure and is on track to achieving its target of ensuring that at least 70% of the motorway and trunk road network is in satisfactory structural condition at the end of March 2009.
- Other roads in the network are being maintained to receive resurfacing treatment of 20% of that recommended in best practice guidelines by the end of March 2009. This figure is based on the budget allocation for 2008-09. The 30% target to March 2011 reflects the higher allocations in 2009-10 and 2010-11.
- Progress is being made towards ensuring that the target of 77 million passenger journeys per annum across all bus and rail public transport, which was achieved at the end of March 2008, is maintained through to 2011.
- The average age of the Metro and Ulsterbus fleets meets the target of 8 years. No Metro bus is over 18 years old. Some 167 Ulsterbus buses are over 18 years old and 4 coaches are over 4 years old.
- The tender process to procure 20 additional new trains commenced in September. It is envisaged that the first of these trains will be introduced into service in 2011.
- The Department is also supporting Translink to:
 - construct a new railway station at Newry, which is due to be completed by September 2009;

- complete £40m of track improvements between Knockmore and Lurgan by March 2011. The feasibility study is complete and the economic appraisal is being prepared;
 - complete £12m of track extension works between Ballymena and Coleraine by March 2011. The tender process for main works is underway and work on site expected to start in November 2008; and
 - progress work on a major track relay project from Coleraine to Derry by March 2011. The Project Initiation Document has been completed and this target is on track for achievement.
- The Department published a Strategic Outline Case for the Development of a pilot Rapid Transit network for the Greater Belfast Area in April 2008. Since its publication the Department has been undertaking a focused engagement exercise on the outcomes of the study with key stakeholders. This has involved undertaking presentations and discussions with various community, business and political representatives and undertaking briefing for the Regional Development Committee. The Assembly also discussed the study outcomes during a take note debate on 3 June 2008.
- We are also aiming to implement effective governance structures (currently those required by the Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006) and comply with timescales resulting from the Executive Review of water charging. While some progress has been made on governance arrangements, progress in relation to water charging is dependent on an Executive decision.

The Department has also taken forward cross-cutting issues in conjunction with DETI and DOE in the delivery of our commitments under PSA 1: Productivity Growth and PSA 14: Promoting Safer Roads.

Progress against 2 of the targets allocated to DRD in the PfG will take a little longer than planned:

- PSA 13 includes a target that all Metro and Ulsterbus buses and coaches are to be 100% accessible by 2012. By 2012 Ulsterbus will still have 106 buses for school service use. These vehicles, while DDA compliant, would not be wheelchair accessible. These vehicles are not due to be replaced until approximately 2015-16.
- PSA 13 also includes a target to have new primary legislation in place for the Harbours by January 2009. The Harbours (Northern Ireland) Bill has now been drafted but confirmation is needed from Department of Finance and Personnel / Treasury / Office of National Statistics (ONS) on the "classification of trust ports" before Executive clearance for consultation on the draft legislation can be sought. The length of any delay (and the criticality of it) is dependent on the advice from ONS.

Trust Ports

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development how many employees are employed full-time in each Trust Port. (AQW 492/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The number of people employed full time by trust ports on 22 September 2008 are as follows:

Belfast	-	128
Coleraine	-	4
Derry	-	45
Warrenpoint	-	45

Craigantlet Hills

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development when work will start on the new roundabouts in the Craigantlet Hills area. (AQW 497/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has recently commissioned work to assess a number of options to improve safety and the flow of traffic in the Craigantlet Hills area. After an optimum layout has been identified, detailed design will be undertaken to allow the statutory processes to commence. These processes take time to complete and a scheme is unlikely to be considered for programming before 2011.

I can advise that recent estimates indicate that this scheme is likely to cost approximately £2 million. The inclusion of a potential scheme for the Craigantlet area on a future works programme would be subject to the various competing priorities, as well as the availability of the necessary land and finance.

Traffic Accident History for the M5 Motorway

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to extend the crash barrier on the Belfast bound carriageway of the M5, to ensure that pedestrians and cyclists using the sustrans path adjacent to the motorway and Belfast Lough, have a greater degree of protection in the event of a road traffic accident. (AQW 502/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service completed an analysis of the traffic accident history for the M5 motorway for the period 2003-2006, in November 2007. After consideration of the recorded injury collision history on this section of the M5 they have advised that, there are currently no plans to extend the safety barrier at this location.

Roads Service will continue to review accident records for the M5 on a regular basis and implement remedial action, as necessary.

Lighting in Communities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact proper lighting has on community safety. (AQW 519/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the safety of all road users is their main focus when providing and maintaining street lighting. It is recognised that street lighting has a wider social role, contributing to night-time social and economic activities, while also making a positive impact on community safety by helping to reduce crime.

Subsidence of the Drumnakilly Road

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department will immediately engage in remedial works to prevent further subsidence of the Drumnakilly Road into private property between its junction with the Farmhill Road and the entrance to Gaelscoil na gCrann. (AQW 551/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they are unaware of any subsidence problems along this stretch of road and therefore have no plans to carry out any works at this location.

As regards AQW 552/09, Roads Service has plans to realign a 200 metre length of the Farmhill Road in the vicinity of its junction with the Ballynamullan Road. The work will include the replacement of Ballynamullan Bridge, and the provision of visibility sight splays at the Farmhill Road / Ballynamullan Road junction. There are also plans to replace a culvert adjacent to house number 17 at the Cookstown Road end of Farmhill Road, and provide a short 20 metre length of link footway.

The completion of these schemes was proposed for this financial year. However, a difficulty has been encountered during land negotiations and this has delayed the issuing of the works order to the contractor.

Roads Service is therefore unable to provide a definite completion date for these schemes at the present time.

Realignment Scheme on the Farmhill Road

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development for the completion date of the road

widening and realignment scheme on the Farmhill Road, Killyclogher, Co. Tyrone. (AQW 552/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they are unaware of any subsidence problems along this stretch of road and therefore have no plans to carry out any works at this location.

As regards AQW 552/09, Roads Service has plans to realign a 200 metre length of the Farmhill Road in the vicinity of its junction with the Ballynamullan Road. The work will include the replacement of Ballynamullan Bridge, and the provision of visibility sight splays at the Farmhill Road / Ballynamullan Road junction. There are also plans to replace a culvert adjacent to house number 17 at the Cookstown Road end of Farmhill Road, and provide a short 20 metre length of link footway.

The completion of these schemes was proposed for this financial year. However, a difficulty has been encountered during land negotiations and this has delayed the issuing of the works order to the contractor.

Roads Service is therefore unable to provide a definite completion date for these schemes at the present time.

Works at the Bush Manor Bushforde Area of Antrim

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the outstanding works to be completed by the developer in the Bush Manor Bushforde area of Antrim; and (ii) any road building or water infrastructure bonds that have been defaulted upon; to confirm if Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water intend to appoint independent contractors to complete this work; and for an estimate of the cost of completing the work. (AQW 617/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Bush Manor, Bushforde is a large residential development containing a number of different housing phases, which has not been adopted by my Department's Road Service. The roads within the development are well progressed, but there are outstanding works including street lighting, drainage and kerbing repairs, along with the full wearing course surface.

The developer has not defaulted on any roads bonds and Roads Service has no plans to appoint an external contractor to finish the works, in what remains, an active site. At this point, an estimate of the costs for the completion of the road works by Roads Service is not considered necessary. Sufficient finance is held within the roads bonds to complete any road works that may be necessary at a future date.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that the sewers in phase 1 of the development have already been adopted. The sewers in the remaining phases have been inspected and, apart from some minor defects which will need to be rectified by the developer, the sewers have been constructed to an acceptable standard for future adoption by NIW.

Speed Limits Approaching the Sandyknowes Roundabout

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the speed limits on all routes approaching the Sandyknowes Roundabout; and what plans she has to review these limits, particularly on the Antrim Road near housing developments.

(AQW 618/09)

The Minister for Regional Development:

Officials in my Department's Roads Service have confirmed that a 30 miles per hour (mph) speed limit applies on the Sandyknowes Roundabout, and on sections of all the approach roads, immediately before the roundabout. The table below details the speed limit on the approach roads to Sandyknowes Roundabout beyond the immediate 30 mph section.

Road	Speed Limit
M2	National Speed Limit
B95 Scullions Road	40 mph
A6 Antrim Road (towards Templepatrick)	National Speed Limit
A8(M)	National Speed Limit
B90 Ballyhenry Road	30 mph
A6 Antrim Road (towards Glengormley)	30 mph

With regard to a review of the speed limits, I am advised that the current limits are considered appropriate, but will be reviewed if circumstances change on any of the approach roads. I understand that Roads Service, in conjunction with the PSNI, recently reviewed the speed limits on the Antrim Road and concluded that the current limits are appropriate.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Heating Costs

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to ensure people in social housing can afford to heat their homes, in light of increasing heating costs. (AQW 267/09)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): In response to the ever increasing cost of fuel I established a Fuel Poverty Task Force in May. The aim of the Task Force was to produce short term recommendations to assist those in greatest need this winter. The Task Force has submitted its findings to me and I have circulated recommendations to Executive colleagues seeking their endorsement of a number of recommendations emanating from work undertaken by the Fuel Poverty Task Force.

As part of the New Housing Agenda I announced that all new Social Houses built from April this year would have to conform to new standards that will in effect make them more energy efficient than before. This will help reduce energy bills for tenants.

Social Housing Schemes

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing schemes have (i) commenced; and (ii) been completed, between May 2007 and July 2008. (AQW 279/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The number of social housing schemes started and completed between May 2007 and July 2008 are as follows:-

Starts	202 schemes
Completions	190 schemes

Social Housing

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been allocated social housing between May 2007 and July 2008. (AQW 280/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There were 8,136 social housing allocations made between the 1st May 2007 and the 31st July 2008.

Social Housing Development Programme

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing schemes are planned for the period September 2008 to August 2009. (AQW 281/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Housing Development Programme has some 90 schemes planned to go on site in the period 1 September 2008 to 31 March 2009. It is not possible to detail the number of social housing schemes planned for the period April 2009 to August 2009 as full

information regarding the planned schemes will not be available until the new financial year.

Financial Difficulties

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what action her Department is taking to help address the financial difficulties being faced by community organisations in the South Belfast constituency. (AQW 287/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department provides support to community organisations through a variety of different programmes. Under the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme, Belfast Regeneration Office is appraising the funding needs of a number of projects in the South Belfast area at present.

Social Housing Units in Upper Bann

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the location of, new social housing units that have been built in the Upper Bann constituency since 2005. (AQW 293/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There have been 82 new social housing units built in the Upper Bann constituency since 2005. They are located as follows:-

Castle Lane, Lurgan	20 units
Hospital Site Phase 1, Banbridge	25 units
Hospital Site Phase 2, Banbridge	6 units
5 Lilburn Hall, Lurgan	4 units
Gilpin Mews, Lurgan	20 units
Lilburn Hall & Bowen's Close, Lurgan	6 units
Hillside Park, Gilford	1 unit

Social Housing Development Programme

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the progress made on sites in Monkstown that have been identified for social housing; and when construction work will start at these sites. (AQW 303/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Housing Development Programme contains two schemes for a total of 40 units of social housing for Monkstown. These schemes are programmed for years 2010/11 and 2012/13.

The Monkstown Area Appraisal has been completed and sites have been identified. The sites

are with Planning Service for agreement to build in principle, as part of an estate appraisal.

Following agreement with Planning Service a Housing Association will be appointed to take the schemes forward. These schemes may be brought forward in the Programme subject to appropriate approvals and the availability of finance.

Proposed Development in Holywood Town Centre.

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what progress her Department has made on the proposed development in Holywood town centre. (AQW 312/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Negotiations on this development had reached an advanced stage and due diligence work had been substantially completed with the proposed developer when legal problems thwarted further progress. DSD and DRD have worked with solicitors from DFP to resolve these difficulties and officials are now re-engaging with the developer to finalise agreements. I met with the developer for the Holywood scheme in August to explain the actions that all parties needed to take in order to progress the scheme.

Smartwater Service in the Crumlin Area

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for an update on the Smartwater project in Crumlin; (ii) to list the streets that are covered by the project; and (iii) what plans she has to expand the project further. (AQW 326/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Approximately 1000 properties have been offered the Smartwater service in the Crumlin area, with 520 households accepting, including more than 90% of those originally invited to participate in the scheme. The Housing Executive, in partnership with the PSNI and the local Neighbourhood Watch, is currently approaching the remaining households where requests have yet to be actioned. Street signage advertising the use of Smartwater in the area has been produced and will be erected by the local Council.

Below is a list of those streets included within the scheme.

Cairn Gardens	Glenoak Gardens
Cairn Terrace	Glenoak Grange
Cairn Walk	Hunter Lea * (2 properties)
Camlin Gardens	Lakeview

Camlin Park	Landgarve Manor
Canning Grove	Laurelvale
Cidercourt Drive	Main Street * (1 property)
Cidercourt Park	Orchard Grove
Cidercourt Road	Orchard Hill
Glendarragh Drive *(1 property)	Parkley
Glendarragh Park	The Beeches
Glenfield Close	

* These areas were identified through the use of crime statistics and in co-operation with the local Crime Prevention Officer.

The Crumlin Smartwater project was a one off partnership initiative and I have no plans to extend the service to other areas.

Economic Development in Craigavon

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development what plans her Department has to provide community and economic development in the Brownlow area of Craigavon. (AQW 334/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Primary responsibility for provision of community and economic development in the Brownlow area of Craigavon lies with Craigavon Borough Council and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment respectively. However my Department has been directly involved in promoting community development, in partnership with the Council, through the Community Support Programme under which £317,000 has been allocated to projects in the Craigavon Borough Council area. In addition over £100,000 has been allocated specifically to the Brownlow area through other programmes funded by the Voluntary and Community Unit and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. As regards economic development, funding of £1m has recently been allocated from the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund to support economic development in the part of the Brownlow area within the Neighbourhood Renewal Boundary.

Provision of Traveller Sites

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on (i) current; and (ii) proposed, provision of traveller sites in the Craigavon area. (AQW 335/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There is currently a requirement for two serviced sites and one transit site in the Craigavon Area to accommodate the needs of both resident and nomadic Travellers. There is currently one six pitch serviced site at Monbrief

Road, Craigavon and an emergency halting site at Legahory Green.

A planning application has also been made by the Housing Executive to develop serviced sites on council owned land at Lake Road adjacent to Burnside.

Allocated Housing in Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what number of points are required to be allocated housing in (i) West Belfast; and (ii) North Belfast. (AQW 352/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There is no set number of points required before a property will be allocated

Social and Affordable Housing

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the land earmarked for the development of social and affordable housing; and (ii) the number and type of units proposed for each development, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 354/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested relates to the five year Social Housing Development Programme (2008/2009 to 2012/2013) which is a lengthy document and is up dated on a weekly basis. However, it can be accessed at <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/socialhousingdevelopmentprogramme19thsept08.xls>

High-Rise Developments

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of high-rise developments planned by her Department; and (ii) the parliamentary constituencies in which these will be located. (AQW 356/09)

The Minister for Social Development: For the purposes of the Social Housing Development Programme, five storeys or higher are defined as high rise. Within the current programme year 2008/09 two such schemes are programmed to start;

- BIH, Great Georges Street , North Belfast Constituency
- Clanmill, Pottingers Quay , East Belfast Constituency
- From the Urban Regeneration perspective;
- Obel Development, Donegal Quay, North Belfast Constituency.

- York Street Development, North Belfast Constituency.
- St Anne's Square Development, North Belfast Constituency.
- Lanyon Towers Development, South Belfast Constituency.
- The 'Boat' Development, Custom House Square, North Belfast Constituency.
- Pottinger's Quay Development, East Belfast Constituency.
- Soloist Development, Lanyon Place, South Belfast Constituency.
- The Ramparts Development, Coleraine, East Derry/Londonderry constituency.

Houses in the Private Rented Sector

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the private rented sector have been inspected in the last three years; and of those inspected (i) how many were found to be overcrowded; (ii) how many were substandard and required necessary repairs; (iii) how many proprietors were taken to court; and (iv) what was the outcome of these court cases. (AQW 358/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department does not hold this information. District Councils undertake inspections in the private rented sector and there is no requirement to inform the Department of the number of properties inspected.

Social Security System

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the effects of the 'credit crunch' and the downturn in both the local and global economy on the social security system. (AQW 379/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency anticipates an increase in demand on its service particularly from individuals who find themselves out of work or experiencing financial hardship. The full range of social security benefits will continue to be available to provide support depending on individual circumstances.

Co-Ownership Housing Scheme

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans for the future development of the co-ownership housing scheme. (AQW 381/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Earlier this year I set out the New Housing Agenda, which proposes a number of initiatives designed to assist future development of the co-ownership housing scheme.

It is my intention to amend the co-ownership scheme to make it possible for people to enter it more easily by buying 25% of the value of a property as opposed to the current minimum of 50%. It is also my intention to make it easier for people to purchase additional shares in their home by reducing the minimum increment from its current 12.5% to just 5%. These proposed changes will be dependent on to satisfactory consultation.

Affordable Housing

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to detail her Department's plans to deliver more affordable housing for first-time buyers. (AQW 382/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Earlier this year I set out my New Housing Agenda, which proposes a number of initiatives designed to assist first-time buyers.

These include, amending the House Sales Scheme to allow social housing tenants to buy part of their home, on an equity sharing basis, if they cannot afford to buy it all. Consultation on this proposal is on-going. It is also my intention to amend the co-ownership scheme to make it possible for allow people to enter it more easily. I also intend to introduce developer contributions to make available more affordable housing.

I have also supported the development of shared equity schemes here. These industry-led, privately financed schemes have the potential to make a contribution towards meeting housing need while also providing a much needed boost to the housing market. I would like to see this initiative rolled out where appropriate.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Paisley Jnr asked the Minister for Social Development to make a statement on the Warm Home scheme; and what reductions to the scheme have been approved by her Department in the current financial year. (AQW 413/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme will have a budget in excess of £20 million this year. The scheme has been very successful and no reductions have been approved by DSD in the current financial year.

Housing Executive Estates in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development what programmes are planned to upgrade the Housing Executive estates in the East Belfast constituency; and to detail the estates that will be included over the next 5 years. (AQW 419/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The tables below indicate the programmes that are planned to upgrade the Housing Executive estates in the East Belfast constituency over the next five years.

2008/2009 - REVENUE REPLACEMENT (KITCHENS)

Estate	Dwellings
Lord Street/Trillick (on site)	112
Short Strand, Phase 3 (on site)	101
Vicarage/Glenallen	80
Ashmount	90

2009/2010 - EXTERNAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE:

Estate	Dwellings
Albertbridge Rd/Tower St	189
Avoniel/Bloomfield	266
Hollywood Road	213
Summerhill/Ardcarn	160

REVENUE REPLACEMENT:

Estate	Dwellings
Holland Dr/Wandsworth	58
Clarawood	155
Edenvale/Sydenham	158
Erskine St/Chamberlain St	68

MULTI ELEMENT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME:

Estate	Dwellings
Clarawood (Economic appraisal to be completed)	28

2010/2011 - EXTERNAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE:

Estate	Dwellings
Ashmount	90
Ladas Way	102

REVENUE REPLACEMENT:

Estate	Dwellings
Willowfield / Upper Castlereagh	56
St Leonards Crescent	68

2011/2012 EXTERNAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE:

Estate	Dwellings
Lower Newtownards Road	201
Inverary	154

REVENUE REPLACEMENT:

Estate	Dwellings
Island Street	37
Templemore/Avoniel	176
Ravensdale/Clara	29

MULTI ELEMENT IMPROVEMENTS:

Estate	Dwellings
Lendrick/Parker	63
Claraway	27
Ardgowan Drive	6
Inverary Bungalows	11
Dehra Grove	16

2012/2013 EXTERNAL CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE:

Estate	Dwellings
Carnet/Clarawood	155
Short Strand/Bridge End/Cluan	279

REVENUE REPLACEMENT:

Estate	Dwellings
Constance/Edith	59
Frank/Stormont Street	25
Lower Beersbridge/The Mount	115
Bloomfield	94
Mourne/Hornby	125
Newcastle	15
Major	59

All schemes are subject to the availability of finance.

Vandalism and Graffiti in East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the work of her Department to tackle (i) vandalism; and (ii) graffiti, in each of the estates in (a) District 2 East Belfast; (b) the East Belfast constituency; (c) the Housing Executive District of Castlereagh. (AQW 420/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The work carried out to tackle vandalism and graffiti in the areas in question is as follows:-

East Belfast: The Housing Executive has two Estate Wardens in East Belfast, one of whose primary role is to undertake regular inspections of their estates with a particular objective of ensuring that any vandalism is identified and repaired speedily. Both Estate Wardens also deal with graffiti issues.

The Housing Executive, in conjunction with Belfast City Council, has a jointly funded neighbourhood warden for the Short Strand area who covers vandalism, illegal dumping issues and graffiti.

The Housing Executive is also part of an Anti-social behaviour Forum with Belfast City Council and PSNI. This forum can identify anti-social behaviour hotspots and formulate a strategy to deal with these. In practice, all of the hotspots have been in Belfast City Centre public parks.

Castlereagh: Castlereagh also has a dedicated Neighbourhood Warden who liaises with Council officials, PSNI and other stakeholders, in respect of local issues identified while she is out on site.

The Housing Executive District Manager also sits on the local Community Police Liaison Committees which meet bi-monthly with senior PSNI officers, community representatives and elected representatives dealing with local crime, vandalism, graffiti and community cohesion issues.

However, the NIHE's biggest contribution in tackling vandalism has been their investment in the physical renewal programme where long-term voids, which are often a focus for anti-social behaviour, vandalism and graffiti, have either been demolished, refurbished, redesigned or sold.

2006 House Condition Survey

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many more people will fall into the fuel poverty bracket due to the increasing cost of fuel; and what action she is taking to address fuel poverty. (AQW 449/09)

The Minister for Social Development: According to the 2006 House Condition Survey 34% of households

in Northern Ireland are in fuel poverty. The ever increasing cost of fuel means that this figure will have risen, however, the House Condition Survey is the most up to date information available.

In response to the ever increasing cost of fuel I established a Fuel Poverty Task Force in May. The aim of the Task Force was to produce short term recommendations to assist those in greatest need this winter. The Task Force has submitted its findings to me and I now intend to take a paper to the Executive at the earliest opportunity seeking their endorsement of a number of recommendations emanating from the work of the Fuel Poverty Task Force.

Strategic Business Review

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 1908/08, for an update on the current status of the Strategic Business Review. (AQW 456/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Agency is carrying out a Strategic Business Review (SBR) to determine how best to deliver services via its network of local offices in the future. We intend subjecting our proposals to a public consultation exercise which will include a full Equality Impact Assessment. We will await the outcomes of public consultation before making final decisions on the way forward. The impact of SBR on individual offices, including Cookstown, will not be known until public consultation has been completed. However, I continue to remain committed to the retention of a strong network of public offices and the frontline services they provide.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total funding for the Warm Homes Scheme in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 476/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Funding for the Warm Homes Scheme was as follows: in 2005/06 £16 million, in 2006/07 £22 million and in 2007/08 £22 million.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the recent energy crisis, what plans she has to increase funding for the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 478/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I have already increased my department's Warm Homes Scheme budget to £20 million this year.

Increases to Benefits

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to help pensioners suffering from the credit crunch. (AQW 494/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There is a statutory requirement to review all social security benefits including the State Pension each year and to increase certain benefits from April of the following year. The new rates are calculated for most benefits using the increase in the Retail Prices Index for the 12 months ending in the preceding September. This measure is based on a year-on-year comparison of prices. Fluctuations in the costs of a wide range of goods and services, including food and fuel, will be taken into account in the benefit increases that will take effect from April 2009.

The standard minimum guarantee in Pension Credit is required to be reviewed and increased at least in line with earnings. However from this April the increase was higher than the increase in average earnings – 4.2% in line with the Budget 2007 announcement. This more than keeps pace with earnings and prices.

Other sources of help include:

The Social Fund which provides help by way of lump sum payments, grants and loans for those on low income who find it difficult to budget for emergency expenses, funeral costs, or one-off payments for large items such as furnishing a home.

The Warm Homes Scheme - a grant scheme which provides a package of energy efficiency and heating measures, up to the value of £850. Assistance is available to people aged over 60 in receipt of Pension Credit.

Winter Fuel Payments which provide assistance specifically to help older people with their winter fuel bills. The Social Security Agency recently commenced an advertising campaign to increase awareness of the Winter Fuel Payment for newly eligible customers.

Cold Weather Payments which provide financial assistance with extra heating costs during spells when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be 0 degrees centigrade over seven consecutive days. Those in receipt of certain income related benefits may be eligible to receive these payments. For this year only the payment will be increased from £8.50 to £25 per cold weather period.

In May 2008, I launched the 2008/09 Benefit Uptake Programme to increase awareness of social security benefits. In this year's programme 108,000 older people across Northern Ireland will be contacted to make sure they are not missing out on benefits.

Complementing this targeted approach, Social Security Agency staff as part of day to day business, provide a range of services to ensure that pensioners are advised of their potential entitlement to benefits including outreach services.

Previous Benefit Uptake programmes have resulted in £15 million of additional benefit paid to the most vulnerable in our society, £11 million of which was paid to older people.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been (i) received; and (ii) successful, for grants under the Warm Homes scheme in (a) East Antrim; and (b) South Antrim, in each year since 2001. (AQW 503/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The information requested is only available from 2002 and is detailed in the table below. Due to the success of the Warm Homes Scheme, a waiting list has developed and some of the successful applications in 2007 are waiting to have work completed.

East Antrim	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Referrals Received	313	496	286	339	750	635	2819
Successful	273	426	252	299	606	452	2308
Cancelled/ Not Eligible	40	70	34	40	144	183	511

South Antrim	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Referrals Received	353	575	420	609	896	935	3788
Successful	312	512	374	535	736	749	3218
Cancelled/ Not Eligible	41	63	46	74	160	186	570

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage, of Housing Executive stock in the (a) East

Antrim; and (b) South Antrim constituencies, that hold Energy Performance Certificates. (AQW 504/09)

The Minister for Social Development:

Information regarding house sales is collated by Housing Executive District Office areas, not by Parliamentary Constituency. East Antrim and South Antrim Parliamentary Constituencies broadly covers Larne, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey and Antrim.

Energy Performance Certificates became necessary for all houses for sale from 1 July 2008 onwards and, since then, the Housing Executive has sold 2 properties in Newtownabbey, both of which had an Energy Performance Certificate.

There have been no other house sales in any of the other areas above since 1 July 2008.

Complex Needs

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) housing applicants in the South Down constituency have been assessed as having complex needs; and (ii) new builds in the constituency are designed to accommodate people with complex needs. (AQW 527/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Since January 2006 there have been 246 housing applicants in the South Down constituency who have been awarded complex needs status.

There are 49 units designed to accommodate complex needs applicants in the South Down constituency currently programmed although this is expected to change.

Disabled Adaptation Grants

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the South Down constituency have applied for disabled adaptation grants; and of those, how many have been inspected and scheduled for work, in the last year. (AQW 528/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The information is not readily available for the South Down Parliamentary constituency. The Housing Executive holds information based on the current local government District Council model which, for South Down, takes in parts of the District Council areas of Newry and Mourne, Banbridge and Down.

During the 12 months from 1 September 2007 to 31 August 2008, there were 608 applications for disabled adaptation grants in these areas. All 608 properties have been inspected following receipt of an Occupational Therapist recommendation and 524 schedules of work have issued.

Delivery of PfG and PSA Commitments

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development what progress her Department is making in delivering its Programme for Government and Public Service Agreement commitments. (AQW 530/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development is making good progress in delivering its Programme for Government (PfG) and Public Service Agreement (PSA) commitments.

Copies of the full report on first quarter progress to 30 June 2008 have been placed in the Members' Library.

Town Centre Regeneration Schemes

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many town centre regeneration schemes her Department is currently funding; and (ii) where these schemes are situated. (AQW 540/09)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department does not routinely fund regeneration schemes in towns as this is primarily a matter for private sector investment complemented by public sector investment in areas such as public realm. However a pilot scheme for Urban Development Grants aimed at allowing the private sector to address market failure is currently running in 5 towns - Ballymoney, Lurgan, Larne, Dungannon and Strabane. A budget of £450,600 is currently set aside in 2008/09 for this scheme.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what equality proofing her Department used when grading posts that are funded through Neighbourhood Renewal. (AQW 541/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I would refer the member to the response provided to her in relation to the question AQW 8544/08 answered on the 4th July (Official Report Written Answer Booklet of 4 July 2008, Volume 32).

Housing Executive

Mr Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development what budget she has allocated to the Housing Executive to enable it to meet its decent homes target by 2010. (AQW 568/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has been allocated £52m for decent homes for the financial year 2008/09.

Budget allocations for 2009/10 and 2010/11 have not yet been decided.

Homes being Re-Possessed.

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what action her Department is taking to assist people whose homes are being re-possessed. (AQW 573/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Earlier this year I set out the New Housing Agenda. As part of this, I set out my intention to introduce a Mortgage Rescue Scheme, aimed at saving as many homeowners as possible from having their homes repossessed. It is proposed that the scheme will do this through both preventative measures as well as direct intervention.

The preventative measures will allow more emergency advice to be provided. This will help people who are struggling financially explore the options open to them. The direct intervention will be considered only where no other option is available. The Mortgage to Rent element of the scheme would be available to people who have no equity and cannot afford a mortgage payment. Under Flexible Tenure element of the Scheme, the applicant will be offered an equity sharing option based on the amount that they can afford to retain.

Detailed proposals have just been issued for consultation.

Winter Fuel Payments Scheme

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to increase the winter fuel payment, in light of the increasing cost of living. (AQW 602/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Westminster Government introduced the Winter Fuel Payments Scheme in January 1998 as part of its commitment to alleviate fuel poverty by providing help specifically to older people towards their winter fuel bills.

The Winter Fuel Payment is not intended to cover the total cost of a household's fuel bills, but to provide a significant contribution. The payment was £20 when it was first made in 1998. This increased to £100 in 1999/2000 and further increased to £200 in 2000/2001.

An additional £100 for households with someone aged 80 or over was introduced in 2003/2004.

For 2008/2009 there is to be a one-off increased payment of £200 to £250 for those aged 60 or over and of £300 to £400 for those aged 80 and over.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been received for the Warmer Homes Scheme this year. (AQW 603/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Since 1 April 2008 a total of 4,746 applications have been received for the Warm Homes Scheme. There were 4,146 applications for Warm Homes which assists applicants with insulation measures to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and 600 applications for Warm Homes Plus which assists applicants with insulation and heating measures.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development how many households fall into the fuel poverty category; and what measures has the Minister taken, as chair of the Inter Departmental Group on Fuel Poverty, to address this issue. (AQW 604/09)

The Minister for Social Development: According to the 2006 House Condition Survey, 34% of households in Northern Ireland are in fuel poverty. It is estimated that the figure is substantially higher at present. A comprehensive set of proposals to alleviate fuel poverty has been developed and circulated to Ministers.

This will be discussed when the Executive next meets.

Benefit Fraud

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total cost of (i) benefit fraud; (ii) housing benefit fraud; and (iii) the total percentage of monies paid out in benefits that this represented, in each of the last three years. (AQW 608/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The most recently published information is set out in the tables below. Substantial progress has been made in reducing the proportion of monies lost to fraud.

TABLE 1
SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS (SSA): – ESTIMATED COST OF BENEFIT FRAUD.

2004/05			2005			2006		
Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost
£28.8	£3320	0.87	£28.6	£3406	0.84	£18.1	£3501	0.5

TABLE 2
HOUSING BENEFIT: - ESTIMATED COST OF BENEFIT FRAUD

2004/05			2005			2006		
Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost	Estimated Benefit Fraud (m)	Benefit Expend (m)	% lost
£2.3	£392.2	0.6	£4.0	£403	1.0	£3.3	£438.9	0.8

Women's Centre Childcare Fund

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the funding for each women's centre that has been granted through her Department's Women's Centre Childcare Fund, for this financial year. (AQW 619/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Funding has been provided by my Department through the Women's Centres Childcare Fund this financial year as follows:

Atlas Women's Centre	£47,651.18
Ballybeen Women's Centre	£175,270.20
Chrysalis Women's Centre	£21,306.98
Falls Women's Centre	£52,383.65
First Steps Women's Centre	£39,765.48
Footprints Women's Centre	£77,285.05
Greenway Women's Centre	£65,016.10
Magherafelt Women's Group	£121,678.42
Shankill Women's Centre	£49,670.35
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group	£13,512.88
The Women's Centre	£30,487.96
Waterside Women's Centre	£35,743.92
Windsor Women's Centre	£109,371.48

Environmental Improvement Schemes

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of; and (ii) location, of planned Environmental Improvement

schemes to start in the Colin area of West Belfast in the next 2 years. (AQW 705/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There are 3 environmental improvement schemes planned for the Colin area of West Belfast in the next 2 years. These are located at Stewartstown Road, Laurel Glen adjacent to Glenside and Woodside Housing Estates and Sally Gardens Community Centre, Bell Steele Road, Poleglass.

A number of other schemes are under consideration. The delivery of all schemes is subject to agreement on scheme design, satisfactory economic appraisals and the necessary funding being available.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Prime Minister's Visit to Parliament Buildings

Mr W Clarke asked the Assembly Commission to give the total cost it incurred in organising the visit of the Prime Minister to Parliament Buildings on Tuesday 16 September 2008. (AQW 577/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The total estimated cost incurred by the Assembly Commission in organising the Prime Minister's visit to Parliament Buildings on Tuesday 16 September 2008 was £9,113.11. These costs include additional broadcasting, hospitality, photography, and security resources. The costs are at this stage only estimated because final bills have not yet been presented in a number of areas.

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