
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 16 January 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

European Charter on Minority Languages

Mr P Butler asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to demonstrate how its Department and its arms length bodies, have applied, in practice, the European Charter on Minority Languages in relation to the Irish language. (AQW 3522/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Department and its arms length bodies comply with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in respect of the Irish Language and Ulster Scots. The Guidance and Codes of Courtesy for Irish and Ulster Scots, developed by an Inter-Departmental Charter Implementation Group (ICIG), was adopted by OFMDFM in February 2004 to assist staff to apply the principles of the Charter, as may be required by users of the services provided by the Department and its arms length bodies.

OFMDFM has published a number of documents aimed at children and young people which have been translated into Irish to be provided to the Irish medium primary schools and Irish medium units within primary schools.

The Children and Young People's Unit is currently producing, in Irish, awareness raising material, including a document called Spin Wheel, on children's rights under the UNCRC for primary school children which will be distributed to Irish medium primary schools and Irish medium units within primary schools.

As part of the Community Relations Council's overall responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, it has made a commitment to make available, on request, translated summaries of its main documents.

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Joint Secretariat (North) deals with written correspondence and telephone queries in line with the guidance on meeting UK Government Commitments in respect of the Irish Language. The NSMC Joint Secretariat Annual Report is available in Irish on the NSMC Website, which has a link from the OFMDFM website.

In the context of a public consultation on the Review of the Civic Forum, OFMDFM received a consultation submission in the Irish language from POBAL, the Irish language umbrella group. The Department has published the submission in full on its Civic Forum review website, together with an English translation commissioned by the Department. The Review Team subsequently met the Director of POBAL.

Mortgage Market

Mr F Brolly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail its efforts to persuade banks and financial institutions to re-introduce liquidity to the mortgage market. (AQO 1734/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We met with the banks in July and December last year to discuss liquidity, lending, interest rates, housing and mortgages.

We urged banks to pass on interest rate cuts and we discussed measures to ease credit to business by considering how we might simplify existing loan guarantee schemes. We were encouraged by the positive attitude taken by the banks towards working with property developers in considering greater use of co-ownership arrangements.

Banking is, of course, a reserved matter and there are limits on what the Executive can do. It is also a complex area, influenced by a great many factors such as interbank lending, capitalisation, margins between loans and deposits, and the need to protect savers and depositors as well as maintain credit to borrowers.

Looking ahead, we will maintain the dialogue we have started with the local banks and financial institutions. We will use our influence to protect and support business and households in Northern Ireland. We remain keen to see the benefits of lower base rates feeding through to lower mortgage payments, lower financing and borrowing costs, and increased credit for local business and people.

Gender Equality

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to set out a timescale for the publication of the Gender Equality Strategy. (AQO 1654/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Executive adopted the 10-year Gender Equality Strategy in the Programme for Government 2008-2011.

Cross-departmental gender equality action plans, one for men and one for women, will be included in a report to Ministers early this year. This will provide an opportunity for Ministers to consider the continuing relevance of the Strategy.

Programme for Government

Mr S Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it is delivering against its Programme for Government targets. (AQO 1635/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First and deputy First Minister continues to make good progress in the delivery of its Programme for Government, targets and we remain on track for the achievement of our PfG commitments and outcomes.

In the last few months we have achieved the following PfG outcomes:

- An additional 3 Bills have been introduced to the Assembly, including the Financial Assistance Bill introduced this morning.
- In October 2008, the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child were sent to all Ministers, MLAs and the Committee for OFMDFM to raise awareness of these issues. Executive Ministers have been asked to consider how they can address the Concluding Observations in the three year Strategy Action Plan for children and young people currently under development.
- In December 2008, Lifetime Opportunities was formally adopted by the Executive.
- On 1 December 2008, Dame Joan Harbison was appointed as the Advocate for Older People.
- A new honorary consul for Poland has been appointed.

We also continue to make significant progress in delivering the 10-year Investment Strategy to renew our vital infrastructure, and in taking forward a range of cross-cutting issues in conjunction with DSD and DHSSPS in the delivery of our commitments under PSA 7, Making People's Lives Better.

Executive Meetings

Mrs N Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the timescale required to catch up on work not progressed during the suspension of Executive meetings. (AQO 1744/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since meetings resumed on 20 November, the Executive has met five times, and once in sub-group format. It has agreed 41 papers dealing with a broad range of issues across all aspects of Government. These bald statistics alone cannot, of course, convey the significant effort which the Ministers of the Executive, both inside and outside its meetings, devoted during this time to preparing its response to the economic downturn, as presented to the Assembly on 15 December.

We must, also, re-emphasise the point made to the Member in our answer to her question of 8 December. Executive business is a continuous process of consultation and agreement on draft papers circulated by individual

Ministers. There will, therefore, always be draft papers at various stages of consideration and awaiting inclusion on the agenda of future Executive meetings.

The length of that consideration is not determined solely by the frequency of Executive meetings, but also by the time needed by Ministers to consider the often complex and sensitive issues and proposals being put forward, before they can be referred to the Executive for its formal agreement.

The Executive will meet again on 15 January and a schedule of future meetings has been agreed. We are now in a position where all agreed papers can proceed routinely to the next appropriate meeting.

Gender Equality

Mrs C Hanna asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when action plans to promote gender equality will be agreed and published. (AQO 1655/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Officials are currently finalising cross-departmental gender equality action plans and will shortly report to us on implementing the Gender Equality Strategy. We will, of course, consult the OFMDFM Committee on the actions plans before they are submitted to the Executive for consideration. The intention is that, following agreement by the Executive, cross-departmental gender equality action plans will be published on the OFMDFM website.

Programme for Government

Dr S Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on plans to revise the Programme for Government in light of the global economic downturn. (AQO 1742/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In recent months the Executive has focused on the challenges presented by the global economic downturn. In this period we have also re-affirmed that improving our economy remains our top priority as set out in the Programme for Government (PfG). In this context we are committed to the ongoing review of the PfG to take account of changing circumstances and ensure we are clearly focused on addressing the key challenges we face.

We recognise that economic conditions have changed remarkably since our programme for government was first set. Notwithstanding this, our decision to prioritise the economy remains valid and it is more important than ever that we deliver on the PfG commitments. We regularly review our targets to ensure they remain relevant and focused on addressing the key challenges we face in the medium to longer term, and we are currently considering the possibility of a more formal stock-take of PfG.

Visit to the United States of America

Mr A Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the outcomes of the recent visit to the United States of America. (AQO 1628/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The key purpose of our visit last month to Washington, D.C., Annapolis and New York was to promote investment opportunities in Northern Ireland and to support InvestNI in its negotiations with potential investors.

We were received at the highest levels and had meetings with President Bush, the Governor of Maryland, and the Mayor of New York. In Washington we were the keynote speakers at the Fortune 500 Dinner. We were able to use that platform to deliver the Northern Ireland business message to over 250 senior executives from America's top companies.

In New York we met with representatives from the stock exchange and we undertook a separate briefing session on investment opportunities with a group of Wall Street executives.

It was clear from all our discussions that, despite the economic downturn, Northern Ireland continues to attract interest from American companies looking for a foothold in Europe. We were greatly encouraged by ongoing support for Northern Ireland and we intend to build on that support during future visits to the United States.

Meeting with Bank Representatives

Mr D O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on its meeting with Chief Executives of Northern Ireland banks. (AQO 1652/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We had a very informative meeting with the four main local banks on 16 December 2008 to discuss liquidity, lending, interest rates, housing and mortgages. In particular, we urged banks to pass on interest rate cuts to local customers to ensure that the benefits continue to feed through to lower mortgage payments, lower financing and borrowing costs, and increased credit for local business and households.

European Charter on Minority Languages

Mr P Butler asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to demonstrate how its Department and its arms length bodies, have applied, in practice, the European Charter on Minority Languages in relation to the Irish language. (AQO 1793/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer the Member to our answer to AQW 3522/09 dated 12 January 2009.

Executive's Financial Package

Miss M McIlveen asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if any Minister voted against the Executive's financial package announced in December 2008. (AQO 1651/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In accordance with Section 28A (8) of the Northern Ireland Act, it is the duty of the Chairmen of the Executive Committee to seek to secure that decisions of the Executive Committee are reached by consensus wherever possible: If consensus cannot be reached, a vote may be taken.

No vote was required in relation to the Executive's consideration of the financial package announced on 15 December.

Departmental Underspend

Mr W Irwin asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the anticipated level of departmental underspend this year. (AQO 1627/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is forecasting a year end underspend of 0.9% (£0.649m) for the 2008/09 financial year.

This comprises a forecast administration cost underspend of 1.1% (£0.177m), a forecast resource underspend of 0.9% (£0.472m), and a forecast capital underspend of £nil.

These forecasts are based on outturn data to 30 November 2008.

Programme for Government

Mr N McCausland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what arrangements are in place to monitor the delivery of the Programme for Government. (AQO 1727/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government is framed under five priority areas which set out a range of key goals and commitments for the Executive collectively to deliver. These are in turn supported by a detailed framework of 23 cross-cutting Public Service Agreements (PSAs) which confirm the key actions and targets departments will take forward over the next three years in support of the Executive's priorities.

The Executive is determined to deliver on those targets and key goals. In that context, departments have worked together to develop detailed Delivery Agreements for each PSA. These Delivery Agreements set out in more detail how departments intend to ensure delivery of the targets and actions set out in the Programme

for Government and provide the basis upon which the Executive will monitor delivery of the Programme for Government. At present, that information is provided by departments as part of the in-year monitoring rounds.

Meeting with Bank Representatives

Mr D Burnside asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the specific commitments it sought from banks and what guarantees were given by bank representatives, at the meeting on 16 December 2008. (AQO 1646/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We met with the banks in July and December last year to discuss liquidity, lending, interest rates, housing and mortgages.

Banking is, of course, a reserved matter. Nevertheless, we urged the banks to pass on interest rate cuts and discussed how we might improve access to credit for businesses. We were encouraged by the positive attitude taken by the banks towards working with property developers and considering greater use of co-ownership arrangements where possible. We do plan to have further meetings with the banks.

Ministerial Code

Mr R Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process for assessing a potential breach of the Ministerial Code. (AQO 1705/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Ministerial Code does not specify any procedure to be followed in relation to the determination of any complaint in relation to its provisions. Section 28A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires Ministers to act in accordance with the provisions of the Ministerial Code and any alleged breach of the Code could be decided as a matter of law.

In addition, questions of confidence in Ministers relating to their observance of the Pledge of Office are specifically a matter for the Assembly under Section 30 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Reducing Paperwork

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to significantly reduce the amount of paperwork she sends to constituency offices and other organisations throughout 2009. (AQW 3733/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): My Department has a statutory responsibility to consult with a range of stakeholders, including political representatives and other interested parties on a range of policy and legislative proposals. In doing so, my Department has an obligation in certain circumstances to provide hard copies of documents. However we are proactive in advising stakeholders and other interested parties about forthcoming consultations, including their availability in electronic media and other formats. We are keen to provide the document in the format requested by any particular organisation or individual, wherever practicable, in keeping with departmental policy.

Ulster Farm By-Products

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 3197/09, what discussions her officials have had with the Department of the Environment about these complaints; and to outline what action is being taken to address the problem. (AQW 3744/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is responsible for implementation of the EU Animal By-Products Regulation No. 1774/2002. The scope of this legislation does not extend to odours.

However, it does require vehicles used to transport animal by-products to be covered, leakproof and clean and dry before use.

My officials conduct regular monthly inspections of rendering plants, including Ulster Farm By-Products, to ensure compliance with the above requirements and this includes a visual inspection of any vehicles present.

My officials also carry out specific exercises on a regular basis to inspect all vehicles delivering animal by-products to rendering plants. A week long exercise was conducted recently to inspect all vehicles arriving at Ulster Farm By-Products. The level of compliance with the above legislation was found to be generally satisfactory, with minor infringements by some transporters noted. These will be followed up in line with normal procedure and corrective action will be taken to ensure compliance.

Individual complaints in relation to any transporter of animal by-products are investigated by my officials with a view to action being taken to ensure compliance.

My officials liaise with Department of Environment officials on such cases as is necessary.

Woodland Grant Scheme

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update of the non-farmer/farmer definition in the Woodland Grant Scheme of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. (AQW 3784/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department submitted an informal proposal to the European Commission to amend the current definition of a farmer on 6th August 2008. We then made a formal submission to the Commission at the end of September 2008, which contained all the proposed amendments to the Rural Development Programme.

In reply, the Commission advised that it wished to clear the amendment relating to Voluntary Modulation (VM) first and on its own. This meant that all other amendments, including that of the farmer definition, had to be put on hold. The Commission issued their decision on Voluntary Modulation in December 2008.

The farmer definition amendment was then re-submitted to the Commission, along with other changes to the Programme, at the end of December 2008 and we await their decision.

Contaminated Animal Feed

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the recent problem with dioxins in animal feed, pig meat and pig fat was discovered; and if it was a result of the normal surveillance carried out by various local authorities. (AQW 3834/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in pig meat indicating a dioxin contamination was discovered by routine monitoring of the food chain for a range of contaminants and was carried out by Southern authorities. When the source of contamination was identified the Southern Authorities advised my Department which Northern businesses had been supplied with potentially contaminated animal feed. On-farm investigations by DARD officials determined the extent of possible contamination in the north.

Contaminated Animal Feed

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what proposals her Department is considering for recommendation to the Executive, in relation to providing compensation for farmers affected by the dioxin crisis. (AQW 3935/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Executive continues to press for assistance to the industry from schemes in the south to be extended to the industry in the north and, following my initial approaches to the DAFF Minister Brendan Smith, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I issued a joint letter to Minister Smith requesting access to the Southern arrangements. The Deputy First Minister has also spoken and written to the Taoiseach in similar terms. Additionally, all those affected are being encouraged

to pursue all appropriate sources of recompense including insurance, the submission of applications to the DAFF scheme and the consideration of legal action against providers of contaminated animals, product or feed.

I understand the difficulties facing the affected farmers as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Food Standards Agency on cattle potentially exposed to dioxin-contaminated feed. Meat from such cattle cannot enter the food chain. The Executive is considering the need for further action at its meeting on 15 January.

Contaminated Animal Feed

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what advice has been given to farmers affected by the dioxin crisis on (i) animal welfare: and (ii) compensation. (AQW 3936/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) DARD officials have been in regular contact with those farmers affected by the contaminated animal feed incident. They have emphasised that the farmers are responsible for the welfare of animals under their care, and should seek guidance from their private veterinary practitioner if they are concerned about the condition of an animal. Where welfare issues have arisen, such as a broken leg, DARD officials have given the veterinarian permission to euthanise the animal.
- (ii) Farmers have been advised that DARD does not have the legal powers to require the slaughter of animals in restricted herds or to pay compensation. They have been advised to consider making application under the compensation arrangements introduced by the government in the south and to consider if there is scope for any appropriate actions which can be pursued against third parties.

In addition, they have been advised that I intend to bring their concerns about their financial position to the attention of my Executive colleagues.

Badger Prevalence Study

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the benefits of conducting a badger prevalence study in establishing a link between the spread of tuberculosis and badgers; and for her assessment of this disease being spread by other forms of wildlife. (AQO 1769/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In December, I outlined a new strategic approach to deal with TB in the North. This will be a holistic approach that addresses three key strands together – real partnership between government and industry, controlling the spread of TB cattle to cattle, and addressing the wildlife factor. All three are priority areas for action.

On the badger aspect, the key question we are seeking to address is whether badger intervention would help to achieve a cost-effective reduction in TB incidence in cattle. The issue is that we do not have the evidence to make an informed decision about that at present. Our priority in the first phase of the strategy therefore will be to build the evidence we need to make informed policy decisions about wildlife intervention.

The proposed badger prevalence study is one of the actions that I believe are necessary to inform decisions. The study will provide baseline knowledge of the level and distribution of disease in badgers across the North. It will let us see if there are differences in the prevalence of TB in badgers across the North and allow a broad picture of the disease in badgers to be established. It will help to inform the design of any future intervention in badger populations, and where any intervention may be most effectively targeted.

The other badger-related information gathering actions that I announced for the first phase of the strategy will also help build the evidence we need. For example the case control study in a TB high incidence area, the development of plans for a badger removal trial, and looking at how best we can contribute to the development of a vaccine for badgers.

We will progress these actions, subject to the agreement of the DOE Minister where necessary, and subject to bids for the significant additional funding that will be needed. I will review the evidence the actions produce to inform my decision about what we do to reduce the transmission of TB between wildlife and cattle and to help shape the next phase of the strategy.

As regards the risk of TB being spread by other forms of wildlife, we know that wild deer may become infected with bovine TB. This is of interest because wild deer can live in close proximity to cattle. My Department is

currently undertaking background surveillance to ascertain the prevalence of bovine TB in wild deer. This study will add to our knowledge of the dynamics of TB infection in wild deer and of the role of deer in TB in cattle.

Whilst TB has also been recorded in several other wildlife species, the role of these species in the disease within the cattle population in the North has not been considered a significant risk to date.

Fishing Industry

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to counteract the losses that will occur in the local fishing industry as a result of the EU cutbacks in days at sea and quota reductions in cod and whiting. (AQO 1701/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is currently in discussion with the English, Scottish and Welsh administrations and the fishing industry here to agree the detailed implementation of the new fishing effort system, formerly known as “days at sea”. My initial estimate is that on average there will 10% less fishing time available in 2009. However, if vessels adopt management and technical measures that reduce cod mortality, more fishing effort can be made available. We hope to agree appropriate measures for the Irish Sea with our industry by 1 February.

The quota for cod in the Irish Sea was cut by 25% in response to continuing scientific advice that the stock is in a poor state. I am currently exploring all opportunities to secure additional quota through quota swaps but the reality is that cod quota will continue to be in short supply until the stock recovers. It is worth noting that our fleet has landed just under 530 tonnes of cod from the Irish Sea so far this year, compared to almost 8,200 tonnes of Nephrops.

Irish Sea whiting has no commercial importance to our fleet and only 10% of the available quota has been taken this year.

Labelling of Local Foods

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to ensure that foods sourced locally are clearly labelled and that a distinction is made between products sourced outside Northern Ireland but packed locally. (AQO 1631/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Responsibility for general food labelling rests with the Food Standards Agency. My Department is responsible only for the EU-wide Beef Labelling Regulations which require all operators in the supply chain, down to retail level but excluding food service, to label their beef with traceability and origin information. The legislation in this area is enforced by DARD inspectors in meat plants and by local authority Environmental Health Officers in retail outlets.

Fuel Poverty

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Minister for Social Development regarding support for people in fuel poverty in rural areas. (AQO 1750/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have been very active in ensuring that rural fuel poverty is a priority within the Executive. I met with my colleague Margaret Ritchie on 16 September 2008 to explore opportunities to tackle rural fuel poverty which could arise from DARD’s Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework. As a result of these discussions we both agreed to collaborate on DSD’s Warm Homes Scheme to ensure that over 600 rural homes earmarked for improvements this Winter received the necessary support. We also agreed that our officials would continue to work together to exploit other joint opportunities for addressing fuel poverty in rural areas.

Winter Gritting Policy

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is involved in any review of winter gritting policy aimed at keeping winter traffic on the move in rural areas and at overcoming rural isolation in icy conditions. (AQO 1766/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have not been involved in any review of winter gritting policy nor have I had any discussions with my colleague Conor Murphy on this subject.

However, this is potentially the type of issue that could be considered in the development of the Rural White Paper.

Electronic Tagging for Cattle

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made on electronic tagging for cattle. (AQO 1718/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I warmly welcome the Industry led initiative for the electronic tagging of cattle. My officials sit on the Industry Working Group and continue to provide technical advice and support. The APHIS computer database has been enhanced to facilitate electronic identification of cattle. The Working Group has made a case to my Department seeking financial assistance. As part of the Farm Modernisation Programme, Electronic Tag Readers and other similar equipment are eligible for support. This Programme will open on 28 January 2009.

Pig Industry

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an update on her Department's assessment of the pig industry. (AQO 1751/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am pleased to report that prices for finished pigs in the north of Ireland are improving although some producers received lower prices in the week immediately following the discovery of the contaminated feed. I am all too aware of the damage caused to consumer and customer confidence following the initial advice given by the FSA for retailers and caterers to remove our pork products from sale, but the improving prices would seem to indicate that the damage has been short-lived.

I recognise the need to send a clear signal to our customers that the Executive is determined to protect the quality of agri-food products from the North and I am confident that the Private Storage Aid for pigmeat, which I was successful in having introduced here, will also help the industry. Its potential value has been put at around £6m. Defra's Chief Veterinary Officer has also written to the CVOs of all the Member States to remind them that there is no risk from pork derived from pigs born and bred here.

Despite these efforts, I am very much aware of the continuing problems faced by the sector due to the vulnerability of the market and would like to reassure producers and processors that my Department will continue to provide whatever advice and assistance it can. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I have written jointly to Minister Brendan Smyth requesting access to the DAFF arrangements. The Deputy First Minister has also written to the Taoiseach in similar terms. We will continue to press this case strongly with the Southern Government.

Meantime I would encourage all those who have incurred losses due to the dioxin contamination to pursue all appropriate sources of recompense including insurance, to submit applications to the DAFF scheme and to consider taking legal action against providers of contaminated animals, product or feed.

Dairy Sector

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial support is available for the dairy sector. (AQO 1719/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I can advise that Government provides a considerable amount of financial support to the dairy industry. In particular my Department provides assistance under Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme which has a budget of £45m. Included in this are Focus Farms and Benchmarking both of which have dairy sector representation; there are a number of items directly targeting

this sector on the list for Farm Modernisation and it also includes the Agricultural and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant Schemes which are open to the sector to apply. Supply Chain Development and Farm Family Options, which will open in the Spring, will also include this sector.

Grant aid of around £120m under the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme is available to producers including dairy farmers. This scheme closed on 31 December 2008 at which stage around 4,000 farmers had submitted claims.

Under the Regional Food Programme the Dairy Council has received significant financial support. In 2007/08 it was awarded £162,500 for generic promotional and market research activities here and in Britain. Recently the Dairy Council benefitted from EU support of circa £200,000 for a marketing campaign entitled "Morning Milk".

My Department also carries out a wide range of activities aimed at supporting the dairy sector. These include the provision of technical support to producers and processors, the provision of knowledge and technology transfer programmes and benchmarking, services which enables farmers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their farm business. The industry also receives significant support from Government through AFBI and CAFRE, including dedicated dairy technologists.

Dairy Sector

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what efforts she has made to secure export refunds for the dairy sector following the free fall in milk prices; and for her assessment of the way forward for this sector. (AQO 1735/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In recognition of the deteriorating market situation I have been working hard to try and achieve a re-introduction of export refunds for dairy products. Following the sharp drop in prices at the October United Dairy Farmers' milk auction I immediately spoke to the DEFRA Secretary of State to seek his support on the matter. Subsequently the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment and I issued a joint letter to Hilary Benn pressing the case for the local dairy industry and making clear our view that Britain should be taking the initiative within the EU by requesting early re-introduction of export refunds. I, along with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister will be meeting with the European Commissioner, Marianne Fischer Boel on 11 February, to ensure that she is aware of the seriousness of the situation. In addition the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, at my request, have written to the Prime Minister to lobby his support on the matter. The Finance Minister, Nigel Dodds, and I subsequently had a meeting with Hilary Benn to impress upon him further the challenges being faced by the sector. This followed a meeting I had with industry representatives when they outlined the case for export refunds to be re-introduced. I will continue to do what I can to support the dairy industry in these difficult times.

We all want to see less volatile prices and this unlikely to be achieved unless industry follows a market led approach. To succeed, the industry needs a higher level of product innovation and to improve the overall levels of efficiency. It must reduce its dependency on commodity-type products such as milk powders and move to the processing of higher added value products. I welcome the steps that have already been taken in this direction.

Hardship Package

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the details of the hardship package for the fishing industry and how it will help this sector. (AQO 1731/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The hardship package announced for the fishing industry includes assistance for harbour dues, landing fees, and light dues. These charges vary from vessel to vessel depending on the size of the vessel and in the case of landing fees, the size of the catch. Harbour dues range from £65 per year for vessels under six metres to £150 per year for vessels over 18 metres long. Landing fees are 2.2% of the value of the catch. Light dues apply only to over 10 metre vessels and the annual cost is £190 plus £20 per metre above 10 metres.

As an example, a 17 metre prawn trawler landing fish worth £170,000 per year would save:-

- Harbour dues of £130,
- Landing fees of £3,740; and
- Light dues of £310.

This package will provide valuable assistance that will help to buffer the effects of a difficult year in which the industry has struggled with record fuel costs.

Dogs Legislation

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an update on the review of dangerous dogs legislation. (AQO 1748/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since I announced my Review of dangerous dogs and dog fighting legislation, I have met a number of key stakeholders.

I am pleased to say that my Review is now drawing to a close. I will shortly examine all the evidence presented to me and will then consider how existing legislation and practices might be improved. At that stage I will make a Statement to the Assembly.

With regard to enforcement of current legislation, and the concerns raised during my Review, regarding the safety of Council officials in carrying out their duties, the PSNI/Council/DARD Working Group has completed a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This will provide a mechanism for co-operation in the enforcement of current legislation. The draft MOU is currently being considered by Local Councils, and I am hopeful that it will be ratified by all Councils shortly.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Foras na Gaeilge

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if Foras na Gaeilge provides his Department with an English translation of the minutes of its board meetings. (AQW 3419/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): Foras na Gaeilge does not provide my Department with an English translation of the minutes of its board meetings. The Department receives the minutes in Irish and they are translated into English using the Northern Ireland Civil Service Translation Service contract.

Centenary of the Ulster Covenant

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how he intends to commemorate the centenary of the Ulster Covenant in 2012. (AQW 3599/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Organisations supported by my Department will be planning events to commemorate the centenary of the Ulster Covenant in 2012. At this time, however, it is not possible to provide any specific details.

I personally would support appropriate events to mark this significant anniversary of the Ulster Covenant.

Reception for Tyrone GAA

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how long the request has been under consideration; and (ii) when will he make a final decision about a reception for the All-Ireland winning Tyrone football team. (AQW 3728/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I wrote to the Secretary of the Tyrone County Board on 28 October 2008 offering my congratulations and advising of my intention to host a reception for the Tyrone GAA Senior and Minor Teams to acknowledge their success.

My officials liaised with Tyrone GAA officials in an effort to reach a satisfactory date. Several dates were suggested and none were suitable but following consultation with the GAA Ulster Council and Tyrone GAA, it has been agreed that I will host a reception on Friday 6th February 2009 at 6.30pm in Parliament Buildings.

Water-Based Tourism

Mr D Burnside asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has, in co-operation with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to develop facilities for water-based tourism. (AQO 1639/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Waterways Ireland has invested significantly in water and land based infrastructure in line with its remit to manage, maintain, develop and restore the inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes

My Department continues to explore scope for developing the recreational or navigational potential of inland waterways, including the provision of water recreation facilities. We are also committed to providing quality angling facilities in Northern Ireland through provision of the public angling estate which includes a total of 64 fisheries available to local and tourist anglers for all types of angling on payment of a small permit fee.

Safety at Sports Grounds

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action his Department is taking to improve safety at sports grounds. (AQO 1760/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for improving safety at sports grounds in Northern Ireland rests, in the first instance, with the owners and operators of those venues. However, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is currently taking forward a safety at sports grounds initiative. The aim of this initiative is to assist owners and operators of major sports facilities to improve public safety at their grounds in the long term.

As part of that process, the Department is currently implementing new legislation on safety at sports grounds, the Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. In addition, Sport Northern Ireland, which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, has been running a number of funding programmes that are designed to assist owners and operators of venues to improve public safety at their venues. These include a Stadia Safety Programme and a previous Interim Safe Sports Grounds Scheme.

I am aware that in December 2008, the BBC's Newline programme reported on a letter from me to the CAL Committee in which I said that all grounds within the top two tiers of the Irish League, the six GAA County Grounds and Ravenhill fail, to varying degrees, to meet the safety criteria as set out in the Northern Ireland Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (the Red Guide). I should like to clarify that defects at some grounds may be minor such as inadequate toilet facilities or a lack of directional signage. My point at the time was to ensure that the owners of these venues and governing bodies were aware that, in order for them to meet the safety standards which will be applied by District Councils in the new safety certification scheme, these minor defects, as well as any major ones, will have to be addressed.

Financial Assistance for Football Clubs

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration is being given to providing financial assistance to Institute FC and Derry City FC for capital investment. (AQO 1663/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI has received an application from Institute FC under its Stadia Safety Programme for development work at its Riverside Stadium. This will include the provision of seating in the North and South stands, additional toilet facilities, a crowd control point, new dug-outs and new turnstiles. The business case for this project is currently under consideration by SNI.

In the case of Derry City FC, I responded to Members through Written Questions and correspondence cases in June 2008 to advise that DCAL was considering a draft economic appraisal from Brandywell Properties Trust Limited for the re-development of the Brandywell ground. As recently as last week, officials from my Department met with the Trust's consultants to discuss the economic appraisal and consider how this could be progressed to a final draft.

Public Record Office

Mr S Neeson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the relocation of the Public Record Office. (AQO 1781/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The construction phase of the new Public Record Office for Northern Ireland, which will be located in the Titanic Quarter, Belfast, commenced on 24 November 2008. I on that occasion, accompanied by the Finance Minister, visited the site.

The building which is scheduled to open to the public in late 2010 will provide state of the art, larger and better facilities for the access of PRONI's records.

The preparation of the records for the move to the new building has already commenced. It is intended that PRONI will remain open to the public for as long as possible. New electronic databases are currently being developed for on-line access and I will be launching the on-line version of PRONI's 'records' catalogue on 2 February 2009.

Multi-Sports Stadium

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how he intends to allocate the £70 million in the current budget period of 2008/09 to 2010/11 for the proposed multi-sports stadium. (AQO 1758/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: An indicative allocation of £70m was made available in the current budget period of 2008/09 to 2010/11 for the proposed multi-sports stadium. The allocation of £10m in the current financial year has been surrendered to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Construction Industry

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures his Department is introducing when implementing the Department's capital programme to mitigate, where possible, the current economic downturn affecting the construction industry. (AQO 1762/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department's capital budget is focused on the construction sector and so its various programmes already have a direct effect on that industry.

Work is currently progressing or planned to begin in the near future on a number of key projects with a combined cost of over £90m. Work on the Ulster Museum refurbishment and the Crescent Arts Centre (Botanic area) is already well underway. There are also a number of major projects coming forward later in this financial year: Lyric Players' Theatre, the Metropolitan Arts Centre and redevelopment of Tollymore Mountain Centre near Newcastle. I am also pleased to report that site work on the new PRONI Headquarters building in Titanic quarter commenced on 24 November last: this construction project alone represents a £30m investment.

In addition, my Department has robust systems in place to ensure that its capital programmes proceed on time and according to plan and, where this has not happened, to identify any reduced requirements promptly so that capital funding can be redirected centrally to areas where it can be of more immediate benefit.

In answer to a call from the Executive to identify additional funding which could be immediately directed towards the construction sector, my Department has already released a total of £2.85m from its capital budget.

Written Responses from Minister

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how long it takes him to respond in writing to an MLA or a member of the public who has written to him. (AQO 1755/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I aim to respond to written correspondence from MLAs, as well as other elected representatives, within 10 working days.

Correspondence from members of the public are dealt with by my private secretary or by officials within 15 working days.

However, where written requests relate to official receptions or my participation in particular events, it is not always possible to respond within those timescales.

Missing Library Books

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he proposes to take to tackle the £566,000 lost through missing library books, across all Education and Library Board areas in the last three years. (AQO 1641/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Education and Library Boards take the issue of stock recovery very seriously and report annually on losses from non-return of borrowed items.

The Boards have a range of measures in place to reduce stock losses. These include a system which prevents users who have not returned library books from borrowing additional books or from using library computers. These measures will remain in place when the Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA) becomes operational on 1 April 2009. NILA will eventually be able to operate the measures on a regional basis.

The Chief Librarians of the Education and Library Boards have set up a working group to consider what further measures could be put in place to reduce stock losses. A report from this working group is currently being considered by the Association of Chief Librarians and will form the basis of recommendations for NILA.

Craft Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps are being taken to ensure that the Craft Industry can take advantage of the Creation Innovation Fund. (AQO 1689/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I launched the £5m Creative Industries Innovation Fund on 17 October 2008 to support Northern Ireland's creative sector and am committed to ensuring that all creative businesses, including those within the craft sector, benefit from the Fund.

A number of sectoral bodies, including Craft NI - the lead body for the development of the contemporary craft and applied arts sector in Northern Ireland - have applied for funding through the Innovation Fund. The outcome of the first call will be announced later this month.

In establishing the Fund my Department and the Arts Council have recognised that businesses will need support and advice to apply for and secure funding. Therefore, it has been agreed that sectoral development bodies, including Craft NI, will assist businesses within their sector by offering additional support to apply to the fund for assistance. The second call opened on 5 January and I understand that Craft NI is also promoting this call on its website.

Events Units

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline what events have been supported by the Events Units in the past year. (AQO 1775/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The DCAL Events Unit has made offers of grant to the following organisations under its Events Growth Fund (EGF) and the Major Events Fund (MEF).

Event	Fund	Offered	Letter of Offer Issued
10th Annual Guinness Blues on the Bay Festival 2008	EGF	£5,000	14-03-08
Aquarama Carrickfergus Incorporating Annual Sea Cadet Corps National Sailing Regatta 2008	EGF	£10,000	25-06-08
Garden Show Ireland 2008	EGF	£25,000	04-03-08
Guinness Folk Festival 2008	EGF	£6,100	25-06-08
Hillsborough International Oyster Festival 2008	EGF	£15,000	25-06-08
International Indoor Athletics 2009	EGF	£7,500	25-06-08
Joint British Isles & International Series 2009	EGF	£7,250	03-09-08
Lough Neagh Fest 2008	EGF	£10,000	01-09-08
Magners Big Tickle Comedy Festival 2008	EGF	£6,500	25-06-08

Event	Fund	Offered	Letter of Offer Issued
Northern Ireland Dance Music Awards 2008	EGF	£5,000	27-05-08
Northern Ireland International Airshow 2008	EGF	£18,000	25-06-08
Out to Lunch 2009	EGF	£6,100	25-06-08
Trans / Urban Arts Academy 2008	EGF	£10,000	25-06-08
26th Annual Northern Ireland Milk Cup International Youth Football Tournament 2008	MEF	£50,000	19-03-08
Atlantic Tall Ships Challenge	MEF	£200,000	07-11-08
August Feile – West Belfast Festival 2008	MEF	£50,000	25-06-08
European Round FIM Trials & World Round FIM Trials 2008	MEF	£40,000	14-03-08
Kennedy International North West 200	MEF	£85,000	05-11-08
Northern Ireland International Horse Show 2008	MEF	£50,000	11-10-08
Rally Ireland	MEF	£850,000	03-10-08
Ulster Grand Prix Bike Week 2008	MEF	£40,000	25-06-08
University of Ulster Foyle Cup 2008	MEF	£50,000	27-05-08
World Junior and Cadet Fencing Championships	MEF	£75,000	27-11-08

Share of Funding to North/South Bodies

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the decreasing value of sterling is affecting Northern Ireland's share of funding to North/South bodies. (AQO 1753/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The 2008 budgets for the North/South Bodies funded by my Department are based on approved actions as defined in their respective business plans. The DCAL contribution to the North South Language Body for 2008 was £ 5,955m. The contribution due to exchange rate pressures is expected to increase to £ 6.5m. The comparable figure for Waterways Ireland as agreed in the 2008 Business plan was £8.8m. There was minimal impact from the exchange rate fluctuations as all of this budget is paid out by Waterways Ireland in sterling.

Public Money Spent on the Arts

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his Department's assessment of the percentage economic return to the economy per pound of public money spent on the arts. (AQO 1665/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There are no current estimates available of the economic return to the economy of public sector funding in the arts. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has, however, commissioned research which found that every £1 of public money invested by the Arts Council leveraged £3.62 in additional funds available to the Arts sector.

Department Underspend

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the demands by both the arts and sporting sectors, why the Department has underspent by £8.9m to December 2008; and to outline what measures are in place to ensure that money committed to his Department is fully spent to ensure the maximum benefit for citizens. (AQO 1662/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The reference is to a return of £8.9m from my Department's capital budget for the current financial year following the December monitoring round. There are two main reasons for the return of this amount.

Firstly, despite our best efforts, capital programmes are traditionally difficult to manage against timetables because of the number of variables which exist outside the Department's direct control.

In such cases it makes good business sense to recognise that all of the capital budget will not be needed in the current year and to release amounts which can then be used elsewhere to benefit the citizens of Northern Ireland. The risk otherwise is that unspent capital is lost to us completely.

Secondly, my Department responded positively to the Executive's call for additional funding which could be immediately directed towards the construction sector following the economic downturn. In this instance, projects were identified where there was a risk of underspend in this financial year or where deferral could take place until next year and the related funding was released to the Executive so that jobs in construction could be protected.

Nevertheless, I can assure the Member that my Department and I are determined that capital budgets should be fully spent where this makes sound financial sense and gives us value for money.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Schools Sited Near Overhead Power Cables

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 2828/09, to name the three schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area, that are sited within 200 metres of overhead power cables. (AQW 3682/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Is iad na 3 scoil i limistéar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt atá suite taobh istigh de 200 méadar ó cháblaí leictreachais lastuas ná:

The 3 schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area sited within 200 metres of overhead power cables are:

- 5011602 Bleary Primary School, Lurgan
- 5032592 St Mary's Primary School, Dungannon
- 5046637 Gaelscoil Uí Néill, Coalisland

Schools' Local Management of Schools Budgets

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Education if staff salary costs will remain as part of the schools' Local Management of Schools budgets and be under the control of the individual Boards of Governors, when the Education and Skills Authority is set up. (AQW 3707/09)

Minister of Education: Tá beartaithe agam go mbeidh costais thuarastail na foirne fós mar chuid de bhuiséad LMS na scoile.

It is my intention that staff salary costs will remain part of the schools' LMS budget. The Education Bill will require an amendment to give effect to this intention for all schools. My officials are currently liaising with the Office of Legislative Counsel on this amendment which I will bring to the Education Committee during the Committee Stage of the Bill, and to the Assembly at Consideration Stage.

Bookstart Programmes

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the benefits that Bookstart Programmes have on improving literacy. (AQW 3711/09)

Minister of Education: Tá an Bookstart Programme tairbheach agus aidhm aige dúil sa léamh a spreagadh i measc páistí ó aois óg agus bainteacht tuismitheoirí in oideachas a bpáistí a chothú, rudaí is cúis le leasa soiléire ó thaobh ghnóthachtáil oideachasúil an pháiste de, mar a tháisceantar i dtaighde.

The Bookstart Programme is beneficial as it aims to stimulate a love of reading among children from an early age and encourage parental involvement in their child's education, which research shows to have clear benefits on a child's educational attainment.

Further to the support provided for Bookstart in recent years, in the 2008/09 financial year the Department has allocated £200,000 through the literacy action plan in support of Bookstart across the north. This plan is based on the direction of travel outlined in the revised literacy and numeracy strategy and will cover the transition year prior to the establishment of ESA.

Support for parental involvement in education, including through schemes such as Bookstart, is a key element of the revised literacy and numeracy strategy, which issued for consultation from 23rd June to 30th November. My Department is currently analysing the responses to the consultation to inform the final strategy. We are unable to make any decision on the long term arrangements for the Bookstart programme until the outcomes of the consultation have been fully considered and the way forward agreed.

Bookstart Programmes

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Education what consideration has been given to introducing or contributing to a Bookstart Programme. (AQW 3712/09)

Minister of Education: Tá an Bookstart Programme tairbheach agus aidhm aige dúil sa léamh a spreagadh i measc páistí ó aois óg agus bainteacht tuismitheoirí in oideachas a bpáistí a chothú, rudaí is cúis le leasa soiléire ó thaobh ghnóthachtáil oideachasúil an pháiste de, mar a tháisceántar i dtaighde.

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Post-Primary Transfer

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education if she has received any detailed proposals from the SDLP concerning the ending of academic selection and post-primary transfer. (AQW 3725/09)

Minister of Education: Chuir an SDLP an seasamh atá acu i leith ceist an aistrithe iarbhunscoile in iúl dom trí chomhfhreagrais a fuair mé ón Choiste Oideachais.

The SDLP have communicated to me their position on the issue of post-primary transfer in correspondence received via the Education Committee. Whilst this cites the Party's opposition to academic selection, it contains no specific proposals.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Active Farming

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to define the policy criteria for 'active farming' under CTY10 (Dwellings on Farms) of PPS21. (AQW 3077/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): “Active farming” under CTY 10 of PPS21 refers to the production, rearing or growing of agricultural products including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animals for farming purposes, or maintaining the land in good agricultural and environmental condition. This is in line with EU and DARD legislation.

Winter Tyres

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of the Environment would he consider introducing legislation to make the use of winter tyres compulsory. (AQW 3582/09)

Minister of the Environment: The levels of snow and ice regularly experienced in Northern Ireland are relatively low compared with other European countries, such as Finland and Norway, where fitment of winter tyres is legally required during winter months. In view of this, and the associated burden, in terms of cost and time, that such mandatory fitment would have on motorists here, it has not been considered appropriate to make winter tyres compulsory in Northern Ireland.

Motorists are nonetheless advised to maintain tyres in good condition and to regularly check them to ensure they are inflated to the correct pressure. They should also take great care in icy and snowy weather and allow more time for their journey.

Red Grouse

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he would consider contacting the Langholm Buccleuch Estate on the Scottish Borders to gain information on how to increase the stock of Red Grouse. (AQW 3666/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has been aware of the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project in Dumfriesshire since its inception in 2007. The Project is a partnership between the Buccleuch Estate, shooting interests and conservationists who are seeking to establish a productive grouse moor while accommodating species of high nature conservation value. The Project has a budget of over £3 million and will be reviewed after three years.

In 2008 my Department published a Red Grouse Species Action Plan and a workshop has been arranged for 18 March 2009 to progress actions in the plan. A member of the Langholm Moor Project Advisory Group has been invited to attend the workshop and will be available to provide an update on the Project and its successes to date.

Bokashi Composters

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if any Councils provide or sell Bokashi Composters to members of the public. (AQW 3672/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency does not hold this information as the Department has no regulatory authority over Councils' provision of recycling receptacles to householders.

GM Food and Farming

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the final ‘coexistence’ regulations in relation to GM food and farming comply with European Union law. (AQW 3708/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is awaiting receipt of scientific reports, commissioned at UK and EC level, relating to coexistence matters and for an announcement from the European Commission on specific thresholds for labelling adventitious GM presence in conventional seeds before taking our coexistence plans any further.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Civil Service

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants by (i) age; (ii) gender; and (iii) religious background, who retired or took early retirement and were subsequently contracted to provide consultancy services to the Civil Service; and, how much was paid for these services, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2599/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The number of civil servants, by age and gender, who retired or took early retirement and were subsequently contracted to provide consultancy services to the Northern Ireland Civil Service during the last five financial years is set out in Table 1.

The religious background of the individuals has not been provided. The purpose for collecting community background information of these individuals during their employment as civil servants was to enable the Northern Ireland Civil Service to monitor within its workforce the effectiveness of its policies on equality of opportunity. The examination of the provision of consultancy services to the Civil Service by community background is not relevant to this stated purpose. Consequently the further processing of community background data would not be consistent with the data protection principles.

The total costs for the services provided in each of the last five financial years is set out in Table 2.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL SERVANTS CONTRACTED TO PROVIDE CONSULTANCY SERVICES POST-RETIREMENT /EARLY RETIREMENT BY AGE AND GENDER

Age (at Retirement/ Early Retirement)	Number	Gender	
		Male	Female
55	2	2	
56	2	2	
57	1	1	
58	2	1	1
59	3	3	
60	17	16	1
61	3	2	1
62	1	1	
Total	31	28	3

TABLE 2: TOTAL COST OF CONSULTANCY SERVICES PROVIDED BY RETIRED CIVIL SERVANTS (LISTED IN TABLE 1) IN EACH OF THE YEARS 2003/04 TO 2007/08

Year	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	Total
Cost (Inc VAT)	£70,247	£62,860	£31,079	£147,557	£112,505	£424,248

Capital Building and Infrastructural Projects

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many capital building and infrastructural project starts have been postponed from this financial year into the next one. (AQW 3572/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have been advised by Departments that 29 capital building and infrastructural projects have been postponed from this financial year (2008-09) into the next (2009-10) at a total aggregated value of £66.92 million.

Large construction projects have lengthy lead-in times involving careful planning, procurement and management. Delay or postponement may be caused by various factors including the need for revisions to project requirements, business cases, planning applications and/or challenges to the procurement process.

You should note, however, that during 2008-09 it is expected that total capital investment by Government will be £1.5bn.

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr G Adams asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide the most recent estimates of the number of citizens in each parliamentary constituency, who are eligible to register to vote, as of 1 December 2008.

(AQW 3686/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not possible to produce a population estimate by Parliamentary Constituency level for 1 December 2008 as population migration estimates up to that period are not yet available.

The attached table gives an estimate of the population eligible to be included on the 2007 electoral register by Parliamentary Constituency as at 30 June 2007.

Population estimates for 2008 will be published later this year.

ESTIMATE OF THE POPULATION ELIGIBLE TO BE INCLUDED ON THE 2007 ELECTORAL REGISTER BY PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY (AS AT 30 JUNE 2007)

Parliamentary Constituency ¹	Population Eligible to Register to Vote ²
Belfast East	62,700
Belfast North	63,700
Belfast South	74,700
Belfast West	62,700
East Antrim	67,800
East Londonderry	69,700
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	77,200
Foyle	81,200
Lagan Valley	82,600
Mid Ulster	70,600
Newry and Armagh	81,100
North Antrim	84,500
North Down	70,500
South Antrim	80,000
South Down	86,200
Strangford	80,000
Upper Bann	86,400
West Tyrone	68,800
Northern Ireland	1,350,900

1 The data in the table above relates to the Parliamentary Constituency boundaries in place at the time of the last Assembly Election.

2 Figures relate to those aged 16 years 7 months or more on 30 June 2007. The figures exclude the Resident Armed Forces personnel and those born outside the UK, Ireland, the Commonwealth or the rest of the EU based on estimates derived from the 2001 Census. However the figures include a small number of others who may be ineligible to register (prisoners and mental health patients).

Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the terms of reference were for Her Majesty's Treasury recent review of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies. (AQW 3764/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Both the DFP and DETI Minister have agreed the terms of reference for the Review of the Regulatory Framework for Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies in Northern Ireland with HM Treasury. The key issues to be covered by the Review include depositor protection arrangements; type of services offered; and consumer information.

I understand that HM Treasury will publish the full terms of reference in the coming days.

Reduction in Paperwork

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to significantly reduce the amount of paperwork he sends to constituency offices and other organisations throughout 2009. (AQW 3794/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My Department adheres to the OFMDFM guidance on Distribution of Department Publications and Consultation Documents.

This guidance outlines that it is a matter of choice for recipients how they receive Government publications. The opportunity to receive publications by electronic means is available if requested.

Rate Relief Scheme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if has considered or will consider a rate relief scheme for sub post masters similar to that in place in Scotland and Wales. (AQW 3818/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Member will be aware of my announcement in the Assembly on 15 December 2008 when I said that I would bring forward a small business rate relief scheme. That scheme will draw on elements of the Welsh small business rate relief scheme, including its provision for significantly enhanced relief for post offices, which includes full exemption for the smaller ones. The earliest such a scheme could be in place is April 2010.

Civil Service Staff

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to confirm that his Department has received additional finance from the UK Treasury to fund outstanding claims for equal pay for Civil Service staff; and when and how it will be received. (AQW 3864/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Following extensive negotiations, in November 2008 the Prime Minister agreed an approach which will provide the Northern Executive with access to £100 million of additional current expenditure.

This approach is aimed at helping to address a range of spending pressures faced by the Executive and provides welcome flexibility to reduce the impact that dealing with those spending pressures will have on the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland, including the impact of the costs associated with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Equal Pay Claim.

However, it is important to stress that the eventual costs of the Equal Pay Claim and other pressures, over and above the amounts made available in the funding package, will fall to the Northern Ireland Executive to be funded. Therefore, it is important that the Executive seeks to further minimise the potential burden on public services.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Travel Claim Expenses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the total costs of travel claim expenses made by Health and Social Care Trust staff, over the last three years. (AQW 3169/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The total costs of travel claim expenses submitted by Trust staff over the last three years were:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
£26,024,370	£29,562,263	£32,942,908

The costs include mileage allowances, public transport costs, subsistence and car parking.

Travel Claim Expenses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the total costs of travel claim expenses submitted by department staff, over the last three years. (AQW 3184/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total costs of travel claim expenses submitted by department staff over the last three years were:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
£439,626	£394,295	£384,278

Travel claim expenses are paid in respect of expenses incurred by staff whilst on essential Departmental business, for example, attendance at meetings, conferences and training courses.

Travel Claim Expenses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the total costs of travel claim expenses submitted by Board staff, over the last three years. (AQW 3185/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The total costs of travel claim expenses submitted by Board staff over the last three years were:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
£710,483	£717,049	£738,089

The costs include mileage allowances, public transport costs, subsistence and car parking.

Hospital Meals

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the average amount of money spent on a hospital meal per patient, in each hospital. (AQW 3201/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Accurate information in the form requested is currently not available as current HSC financial systems do not routinely collect the information required to identify costs per meal. A Strategic Framework for HSC Catering Production is currently being developed together with HSC Trusts for publication in 2009 that includes an objective for HSC Trusts to establish suitable catering management systems to provide greater financial and management control across their catering operations.

Energy Bills

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the total cost of energy bills, in each Health and Social Care Trust, for the last three years. (AQW 3211/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below details energy costs by Health and Social Services Trust from 2005-06 to 2006-07. Information on expenditure incurred in 2007-08 is not currently available.

TOTAL ENERGY COSTS BY TRUST AREA, 2004/05 TO 2006/07

HSC Trust	2005/06	2006/07
Belfast HSC Trust	9,341,818	13,204,886
Northern HSC Trust	3,754,560	4,201,675
South Eastern HSC Trust	3,116,832	4,043,101
Southern HSC Trust	3,088,784	3,611,030
Western HSC Trust	3,293,233	3,769,717
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service	71,581	72,021
Total	22,666,807	28,902,430

Source: TFR E&S Returns 04/05 to 06/07

Consultancy Posts

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many consultancy posts are vacant in (i) Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh; and (ii) Erne Hospital, Enniskillen; and to outline the nature of all vacancies. (AQW 3380/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number and specialty of vacant posts for Consultants in the selected hospitals in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area is given below.

As at 30th September 2008, Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, had one (1.0 Whole-Time Equivalent) current vacancy for a Consultant in Respiratory Medicine & General Internal Medicine. A current vacancy is defined as an unoccupied post, which at 30th September 2008 was vacant and which the organisation was actively trying to fill. This vacancy was not long-term (i.e. vacant for 3 or more months).

As at 30th September 2008, Erne Hospital, Enniskillen, had no vacancies for Consultants.

The Trust have advised that the process to fill vacant posts commences as soon as it is alerted to retirements/resignations or when developments in services require new posts to be created. When posts are being replaced in exactly the same way this is a straight forward and routine process however, if new posts are being created or existing posts redesigned, this requires further work. In the case of medical posts, approval of the relevant Royal Colleges is required. Advertisements are placed in the relevant publications to invite applications and the Trust's Selection and Appointments Policy is applied.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to name all residential and nursing homes that are under threat of closure from all Health and Social Care Trust efficiency saving plans. (AQW 3401/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As of 30 September 2008, there were 317 residential care homes and 252 nursing homes in Northern Ireland, including 62 statutory residential homes owned by the HSC. Of these, the HSC is currently consulting on the future of the following 16 residential homes:

Northern HSC Trust – Clonmore, Newtownabbey; Greenisland Residential Home; Lisgarel, Larne; Rosedale, Antrim; Rathmoyle, Ballycastle

Southern HSC Trust - Skeagh House, Dromore; Slieve Roe House, Killeel; Riverside, Gilford

Western HSC Trust - Foyleville Home, Londonderry; Gortmore Home, Omagh; Greenfield Home, Strabane; Drumhaw Home, Lisnaskea;

South Eastern HSC Trust - Loch Cuan House, Newtownards; Drumlough House, Lisburn; Grove House, Ballynahinch; Ravara House, Bangor.

The Belfast Trust has indicated that it will be making proposals in respect of a number of homes in the future, but these have not as yet been identified. All such proposals will be subject to full public consultation.

The HSC also own 2 nursing homes. There are no proposals to close these facilities.

Cost of Mail

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost of mail, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last three years. (AQW 3530/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the cost of mail by Health and Social Services Trust from 2005/06 to 2006/07. Information on costs incurred in 2007/08 is not currently available.

HSC Trust	2005/06	2006/07
Belfast HSC Trust	979,749	1,123,892
Northern HSC Trust	471,240	488,546
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust	15,512	11,733
South Eastern HSC Trust	351,536	377,943
Southern HSC Trust	406,335	376,811
Western HSC Trust	358,037	407,645

A large percentage of the above expenditure is incurred communicating with patients. Each year between 2005 and 2007, an average of 1.8m people accessed health services in Northern Ireland

Cost of Phone Bills

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the cost of phone bills, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust, in the last three years. (AQW 3531/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the cost of phone bills by Health and Social Services Trust from 2005/06 to 2006/07. Information on costs incurred in 2007/08 is not currently available.

HSC Trust	2005/06	2006/07
Belfast HSC Trust	2,307,571	2,630,198
Northern HSC Trust	1,313,739	1,454,605
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust	456,512	771,300
South Eastern HSC Trust	1,202,242	1,397,210
Southern HSC Trust	928,330	918,442
Western HSC Trust	1,160,669	1,147,866

Each year between 2005 and 2007, an average of 1.8m people accessed health services in Northern Ireland, The above costs, which include telephone rental, are a necessary component in the provision of these services.

Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of appointments that have been cancelled by Lagan Valley hospital in the last year; and the reason for these cancellations.

(AQW 3659/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of outpatient appointments cancelled plus the reasons for their cancellation is only available from 1 April 2008.

During the 6-month period 1 April 2008 to 30 September 2008, 17,650 patients attended an outpatient appointment at Lagan Valley Hospital; in that same period, 904 outpatient appointments were cancelled by the hospital. The table below details the reasons for cancellation.

Reason for cancellation	Number of outpatient appointments cancelled by Lagan Valley Hospital (01/04/08 to 30/09/08)
Consultant not available	517
Medical staff not available	52
Patient treated elsewhere	39
Cancelled by consultant as appointment was no longer required	21
Administrative / GP error	88
Transport not available	2
No reason or incorrect reason recorded	185
Total cancelled by hospital	904

Source: Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return

Data are provisional

Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria are used in the decisions to allocate performance related bonus payments for the Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 3713/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Chief Executives' performance related payments must be based on an assessment of performance against the agreed strategic aims and objectives in the Trust's business or development plan. These will reflect all of the key responsibilities of the organisation, including those stemming from the policy priorities and the key commitments being made by the Executive and by my Department.

Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement on the future of dementia wards in Knockbracken Healthcare Park, South Belfast.

(AQW 3769/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Dementia Wards at Knockbracken are currently being reviewed. The purpose of this review is to ensure that hospital resources are being used effectively to meet the complex needs of people with severe challenging behaviour in line with best practice. This will include consideration of alternative, more appropriate care for some existing patients in discussion with the patients and their families/carers. Proposals will be developed for consideration by the Trust Board in due course.

The number of people admitted to Dementia Wards in Knockbracken in each of the last five years is as follows:

- 2004 : 45 people
- 2005 : 53 people
- 2006 : 48 people
- 2007 : 42 people
- 2008 : 50 people

Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were admitted to dementia wards in Knockbracken Healthcare Park, South Belfast, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3770/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Dementia Wards at Knockbracken are currently being reviewed. The purpose of this review is to ensure that hospital resources are being used effectively to meet the complex needs of people with severe challenging behaviour in line with best practice. This will include consideration of alternative, more appropriate care for some existing patients in discussion with the patients and their families/carers. Proposals will be developed for consideration by the Trust Board in due course.

The number of people admitted to Dementia Wards in Knockbracken in each of the last five years is as follows:

- 2004 : 45 people
- 2005 : 53 people
- 2006 : 48 people
- 2007 : 42 people
- 2008 : 50 people

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will announce the decision on the future of the second NIFRS appliance in Portstewart. (AQW 3835/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to my response to his question in November 2008 (AQW1001/09).

Ambulance Station at Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make a statement about the future of the Northern Ireland Ambulance station at Knockbracken Healthcare Park, South Belfast. (AQW 3982/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans at present to close the ambulance station at Knockbracken Healthcare Park. Ambulance services in the South Belfast area continue to operate from Knockbracken ambulance station and deployment points at Forster Green Hospital and Carryduff.

On 1 October 2008, I announced an investment of some £100 million capital funding over the next 10 years to modernise the ambulance fleet, ambulance estate infrastructure, IT and vital equipment.

Ambulance Station at Knockbracken Healthcare Park

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to how many emergency incidents the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service ambulances based at Knockbracken Healthcare Park have responded, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3983/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below details the number of emergency calls to which a vehicle based at Knockbracken Healthcare Park responded. It should be noted that the vehicle may not have been at base when the call was received or responded to.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Emergency Calls Attended	4158	4419	2935	3063	3204

Ambulance Depots

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where are the nearest ambulance depots to Carryduff and Ballygowan, excluding the one at Knockbracken Healthcare Park; and the estimated response times to these areas from these depots. (AQW 3984/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The ambulance service operates from stations or deployment points. A deployment point is located in Carryduff itself. The nearest deployment point to Ballygowan is in Comber; an emergency response vehicle from the Comber deployment point could reach Ballygowan in an estimated 6-8 minutes subject to driving conditions and other factors.

It should be noted that NIAS will dispatch the nearest available vehicle in response to emergency calls.

Ambulance Depots

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the ambulance depot situated at the Royal Victoria Hospital, is under consideration for closure. (AQW 3985/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are currently no plans to close the ambulance station situated on the Royal Victoria Hospital site.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traffic Calming Measures in Dunloy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the traffic calming measures that Roads Service is considering for Dunloy. (AQW 3668/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has no current plans to introduce traffic calming measures in Dunloy.

As you may be aware, Roads Service receives many requests for the introduction of traffic calming measures. All requests for schemes are assessed taking into account factors, such as collision history, traffic speeds, traffic volumes and composition, and environmental factors, for example, the presence of schools and playgrounds. However, only those schemes that score highest following the assessment procedure are included in the Traffic Calming Programme.

Roads Service is currently developing its Traffic Calming Programme for the next financial year, and an assessment of Dunloy will be carried out to determine whether a scheme here can be included in the programme. I have asked the Divisional Roads Manager to write to you when this assessment has been completed.

Underpass at the Larne Road Roundabout

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Minister for Regional Development when work will commence on the underpass at the Larne Road roundabout at Ballymena, which will connect the M2 by-pass with the dual carriageway. (AQW 3689/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that tenders are currently being sought for a scheme to provide a 2.1 kilometre dual carriageway, which will connect Ballee Road East to the M2 Ballymena Bypass dual carriageway. It is anticipated that construction of this new road will start in April 2009 and take approximately ten months to complete.

Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all work being carried out by Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water in the South Antrim constituency, during January 2009. (AQW 3698/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in addition to the ongoing M2 Improvements Scheme, between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions, the following work will be undertaken in the South Antrim Constituency during January 2009:

- upgrade of traffic signals at the Antrim Road / Ballyclare Road junction;
- upgrade of two Pelican Crossings in association with a footway paving scheme at Market Square, Ballyclare;
- collision remedial scheme at Ballymena Road/Dublin Road, Antrim; and
- footway improvements in the Diamond Road area of Crumlin.

Routine maintenance work will also be carried out on roads in the South Antrim constituency, including replacing the bridge joint of the M2 Templepatrick Bridge during January 2009.

Northern Ireland Water has advised that the following work is being carried out in the South Antrim constituency during January 2009:

- Castle Road, Antrim – Laying of watermain to serve Randalstown;
- Clonkeen, Randalstown – Replacement of watermain;
- Rashee Service Reservoir – Reservoir rehabilitation;
- Antrim & Newtownabbey – Service reservoir - enhanced security work at divisional sites;
- Hightown Road, Newtownabbey – Replacement of watermain;
- Hydepark Service Reservoir – Replacement of joints;
- Ballyvaston Service Reservoir – Reservoir rehabilitation;
- Antrim Road, Aldergrove – Foul sewer upgrade;
- Milltown Wastewater Treatment Works, Antrim – Upgrade of existing works; and
- Various small wastewater treatment works – Priority upgrades.

Belfast to Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if the bus service from Limavady to Belfast will be retained after April 2009. (AQW 3714/09)

Minister for Regional Development: This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that Translink, as part of an on-going review of patronage on service 246 operating between Limavady and Belfast, intends to replace the morning and afternoon peak hour direct services with services connecting to the Derry / Belfast 212 service. This will mean that journeys from Limavady to Belfast can be completed but with a change of vehicles en route at Dungiven.

Travelwise Safer Routes to School Programme

Mrs N Long asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to fund locally based support to ensure children can walk and cycle safely to their school, similar to the Local Authority School Travel Co-ordinators that are appointed by local authorities in the rest of the UK. (AQW 3721/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has two School Travel Plan Co-ordinators, who develop the Travelwise Safer Routes to Schools initiative in schools across the North. This initiative aims to tackle the problems associated with the 'School Run' by promoting more sustainable modes of travel, including walking and cycling, for the journey to and from school. The Travelwise Safer Routes to School Programme is assisted by the provision of safety zones outside schools and the installation of cycle shelters.

Since 2004, the Safer Routes to Schools message has been promoted to some 151 schools involving approximately 45,000 pupils and their parents.

Ballycastle-Rathlin Ferry

Mr D Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of whether the timetable for the Ballycastle-Rathlin ferry in September, October, November and December 2008 satisfied the requirements of the tender process; and how it compared to the previous year's timetable. (AQW 3736/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I am content that the timetable of services provided by the operator during this period satisfied the requirements of the contract. Timetable variations are permitted subject to prior consultation with Moyle District Council and the Rathlin islanders and the approval of the Department for Regional Development.

When compared to the timetable for the same period in 2007 the operator has delivered an enhanced service with more than twice the number of sailings each day.

Level Crossing Barriers at Jordanstown

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how long the level crossing barriers at Jordanstown are activated prior to the arrival of a train at the platform travelling from (i) Greenisland; and (ii) Belfast, and to confirm that these barriers are controlled by an operator based in Belfast. (AQW 3761/09)

Minister for Regional Development: For a stopping train travelling from the Greenisland direction it takes the train an average of 3.5 minutes to clear the Jordanstown crossing.

For a stopping train travelling from the Belfast direction it takes the train an average of 4 minutes to clear the Jordanstown crossing. This additional time is the result of slower approach speeds as the train passes through Bleach Green Junction and the requirement to stop at Jordanstown station before clearing the crossing.

Non-stopping (Express) trains can pass through the level crossing in less time than stoppers. If two trains approach the level crossing in close proximity to each other the level crossing cannot be opened until both trains have passed through. Depending on where the trains are as they approach the Jordanstown Crossing the road closure times can vary.

The Jordanstown level crossing manually controlled barrier is controlled by a signaller from Belfast Central Signal Cabin.

Greyabbey Waste Water Station

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development why landscaping work at Greyabbey Waste Water Station has not been completed even though it was agreed it would be carried out by Northern Ireland Water. (AQW 3787/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the landscaping at Greyabbey Wastewater Treatment Works was completed in September 2007. The area was planted with a grass and wild flower mix to align with the natural environment.

Derry/Londonderry to Belfast Rail Line

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to increase accommodation on the Derry/Londonderry to Belfast rail line, to facilitate passenger growth. (AQW 3801/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Funding provision has been made in the investment strategy for the upgrade of the Coleraine to Derry line costing in the region of £64m. Translink is aiming to start work on site in 2011 and to be finished by 2013 which will coincide with the timing of the next batch of new trains entering into passenger service on the railways network. Two additional trains will be deployed on the Derry line to enable increased services and capacity. In the meantime a £12m project to extend the track life of the line between Ballymena and Coleraine has just started and is expected to be completed by 2010. These enhancements will provide a faster, more frequent train service with journey times to Belfast expected to reduce by half an hour. They will also enable a commuter service to reach Derry before 9am for the first time and facilitate passenger growth.

Resurfacing on the B18 Whiteside Road

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how much was spent on repairs and resurfacing on the B18 Whiteside Road, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3802/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not record details of the total annual expenditure on individual roads. I am, therefore, unable to provide the requested information.

Road Traffic Delays

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the road traffic delays on the Jordanstown Road and adjoining roads when the level crossing barriers are activated; and if he will take steps to ensure that, while complying with the safety levels, no unnecessary delays to road traffic occur in the future, (AQW 3836/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The safety of the public at level crossings is paramount and is discussed at the regular meetings between my Department's Roads Service and Translink.

Translink has advised that safety is the primary factor affecting the length of time for which the level crossing gates are closed. The level crossing on the Jordanstown Road has been assessed as one with a high risk of user violation, and is therefore, subject to an increased level of protection.

While the operation of the barriers on the level crossing at Jordanstown can lead to considerable traffic delays at peak times, leading to driver frustration, I can assure the Member that delays are kept to the minimum necessary to ensure that safety standards are met.

Rail Network Halts

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the development of a railway station at Woodbrook Eco-Village in Lisburn; and the implications of such a development for the Knockmore railway line. (AQW 3854/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink currently have no plans to develop any additional halts or stations on the rail network.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the procurement of new rolling stock for Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 3856/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Negotiations with the proposed supplier are nearing completion. Subject to all end stage procurement and economic appraisal requirements being in place NIR hope to be in a position to sign a contract for the purchase of the 20 new trains before the end of March this year.

Signal Staff

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many signalmen are employed by Northern Ireland Railways in (i) Derry/ Londonderry; (ii) Castlerock; (iii) Coleraine; (iv) Ballymoney; and the length of track each signal box controls. (AQW 3863/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The following signal staff are employed at the identified stations. The table also provides the length of track controlled by the signal staff.

Station	Signal staff	Length of track controlled by signal staff
Londonderry/Derry	4	13.5 miles
Castlerock	4	19 miles

Station	Signal staff	Length of track controlled by signal staff
Coleraine	9	37.5 miles

There are no signal staff at Ballymoney.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

State Pensions

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to breakdown by constituency the total number of people (i) in receipt of State pensions; (ii) in receipt of State pensions supplemented by Pension Credit; and (iii) in receipt of State pensions who do not receive Pension Credit because they receive a works pension or possess other assets or savings. (AQW 3673/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The table below sets out the information requested for part (i) and (ii) which is based on a data extract at December 2008. Information is not available for part (iii) as data is not held on the specific reasons why recipients of State Pension may not be receiving State Pension Credit.

Parliamentary Constituency	(i) No. of State Pension Recipients	(ii) No. of State Pension Recipients Receiving State Pension Credit
Belfast East	15,882	3,959
Belfast North	15,013	5,831
Belfast South	14,146	3,205
Belfast West	12,203	5,794
East Antrim	15,368	3,374
East Derry	14,718	4,038
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	14,159	4,549
Foyle	13,686	5,029
Lagan Valley	18,207	3,697
Mid Ulster	12,779	4,609
Newry and Armagh	15,721	5,198
North Antrim	19,412	4,993
North Down	18,282	3,220
South Antrim	16,676	3,525
South Down	17,089	4,761
Strangford	18,436	3,919
Upper Bann	17,446	5,309
West Tyrone	12,678	4,601
Unallocated Postcode*	3,455	676
Total	285,356	80,287

* In producing this analysis, individual records were attributed to Parliamentary Constituency on the basis of their postcode. Not all records can be correctly allocated using this method, and some cannot be allocated at all.

Housing Benefit Payments

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of housing benefit payments paid to landlords in the North Down constituency, broken down by electoral district. (AQW 3699/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not record the information by parliamentary constituency and consequently it is also not available for electoral district areas. Housing Benefit payments totalling £7,304,767.17 were made in respect of Housing Benefit claims during 2007/2008, within the area covered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Bangor District Office, which most closely matches the North Down constituency. Payments include those to Housing Associations and private landlords.

Liquor Licensing Legislation

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an update on the progress of the review of liquor licensing legislation in relation to opening hours, late extensions and changes to the accounts regulations for private member sports, social and recreational clubs. (AQW 3723/09)

Minister for Social Development: Following my review of liquor licensing legislation in Northern Ireland, I submitted in September 2008 a Bid Memorandum for a Bill in the current session which would modernise clubs' accounting requirements. I sent a related Policy Memorandum to the Executive for consideration in October. I await an Executive decision on my legislative proposal. I have no plans to amend current legislation regarding opening hours and late extensions for licensed premises.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties in the Short Strand area are unoccupied; and for how long they have been unoccupied. (AQW 3737/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has one vacant property in the Short Strand area. It has been unoccupied since 20 October 2008.

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