

Official Report (Hansard)

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 February 2010
Volume 48, No WA2

Contents

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister101

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development102

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure122

Department of Education130

Department for Employment and Learning.....146

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment152

Department of the Environment.....157

Department of Finance and Personnel173

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.....177

Department for Regional Development.....184

Department for Social Development197

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.....206

Revised Written Answers.....207

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 19 February 2010

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

British-Irish Council

Mr A Ross asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what meetings of the British Irish Council are scheduled for the next six months.

(AQO 783/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The British Irish Council (BIC) meets in both Summit and sectoral formats. Plans are being progressed for the next BIC Summit to be held in Guernsey in June 2010. A number of the BIC work streams are planning for Ministerial meetings in 2010. We will provide you with the details for these meetings once they are available.

BBC Spotlight Programme

Mr P J Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they intend to publish the detail of the legal advice provided to the First Minister following the allegations made by the BBC Spotlight programme.

(AQO 785/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The legal advice to which the Member refers was requested by the deputy First Minister and remains subject to legal professional privilege but consideration is being given to whether or how it could be released.

Advice was also sought from Senior Crown Counsel by the Departmental Solicitor's Office, at the request of the Minister of Finance and Personnel, and any query regarding it would be a matter for DFP.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr T Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what additional resources have been allocated to the Planning Appeals Commission since devolution and what impact this has made.

(AQO 786/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: In delivering on our commitment within PSA21 we have allocated over £1.5 million in additional budget to the Planning Appeals Commission over the period 2008 – 2011. This has enabled us to appoint an additional 14 fee-paid Panel Commissioners to address the backlog of planning appeals, and to increase the Commission's capacity at senior levels to enable it to address an increasingly complex workload.

As a result, the planning appeals backlog has reduced from its height of over 3000 in 2007 to a figure of 846 at the end of January 2010. In addition, the Commission has continued to deliver on its referred public inquiry and hearing responsibilities.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr J McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Presbyterian Mutual Society, including the outcome of negotiations with banks and financial institutions.

(AQO 787/10)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On Friday 12th February we met with the Prime Minister to discuss the current circumstances of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. We know that this is a matter which continues to be of great concern to the members of PMS and the wider community and we are grateful for the widespread support that the work to find a solution enjoys and deserves in this Assembly.

Finding a remedy to the PMS problem is a complex matter and there are a number of challenging issues to deal with. This has meant that the work on a solution has taken longer than expected. However, we are expecting the full report on final considerations and options from officials very soon. The Administrator has told PMS members that it is in their best interests to await the outcome of the deliberations of the Working Group.

The judgment delivered by the High Court on Friday that small savers cannot be treated as creditors of the Society will, of course, be a disappointment for those members. The hardships being caused by the present status of the PMS has ever been in our thoughts. We can assure members, that, despite the unfortunate but necessary delays, we are working to secure the best outcome we can for PMS savers.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Preventative and Early Intervention Measures

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the percentage of her annual budget which is directed towards preventative and early intervention measures.

(AQW 4326/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): DARD's net budget following December Monitoring is £262.5m. Virtually all of DARD's business could be described as preventative or early intervention, for example prevention of animal and plant disease or intervening to address rural poverty. However, if we limit the scope of this question to those areas which are engaged in directly preventative measures including programmes in respect of animal disease; flood defence and fisheries protection, then the costs are estimated at £66m, or 25%. This includes the costs of the Veterinary Service; and parts of the Rivers Agency and part of Fisheries Division.

Lost Crops

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 4057/10, why she asked the Executive for funding to compensate farmers affected by the recent rainfall and frost before carrying out a full assessment of the overall cost of lost crops.

(AQW 4435/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have raised the issue of the recent severe weather and the effect it has had on farmers, with my Executive Colleagues on 11 February. I am satisfied that they recognised the damage caused to some potato and vegetable crops, and they have agreed that I meet with the DFP Minister to discuss hardship funding. Subsequently, I have asked DARD officials to assess the crop damage caused by the severe frost in January 2010.

This damage assessment exercise will inform any future financial support consideration, subject to funding and the need to comply with EU State Aid rules.

As you are aware my Department is currently facing significant financial and other resource pressures across the board and while my sympathy is with those farmers who have suffered losses I am very mindful of the need to balance and manage expectations.

Tuberculosis

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on (i) departmental officials; and (ii) consultation reports and fees relating to the link between tuberculosis and badgers; and the date the latest consultation on this issue began.

(AQW 4449/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department does not have a retrospective record of the time spent by officials relating to this matter. Such information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

A Badger Population Survey, as recommended by the Badger Stakeholder Group, was carried out for my Department during 2007/08. The Survey cost £199,000 and was an important exercise to obtain baseline data on the current badger population in the north of Ireland.

Research continues to investigate the prevalence of TB in badgers through the collection and post-mortem examination of badgers killed by road traffic accidents (the RTA Survey). The RTA survey is carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI).

There has been no public consultation exercise initiated on this issue.

Tuberculosis

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps she is taking to address the issues raised in the Public Accounts Committee report that highlighted that £22m has been spent investigating the link between tuberculosis and badgers; and how she intends to stop the spread of tuberculosis.

(AQW 4450/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The figure of £22 million quoted in the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report is the approximate annual cost of the TB Control programme, which includes the cost of TB testing and reactor compensation.

A Memorandum of Response (MOR) to the issues raised in the PAC Report was presented to the Assembly on 16 September 2009. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee has oversight of the implementation of the PAC recommendations and will be updated regularly on progress and related funding issues.

In addition, and in line with the PAC recommendations, my Department submitted to the European Commission a TB Eradication Plan for 2010 setting out our TB programme for the surveillance, control and eradication of TB in cattle.

This TB Eradication Plan for 2010 was ratified by the EU Commission on 16 October 2009. Implementation of this Plan should help to secure a share of the 10 million euro funding from the EU Veterinary Fund for TB eradication in the north of Ireland, England and Wales.

December Fisheries Talks

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has met with County Down trawlermen and fish processors to discuss the outcome of the December fisheries talks in Brussels.

(AQW 4491/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have not met with representatives of fish processors or the NI Trawlermen's Trading Co. Ltd since the December Council. Both are represented on the

Fisheries Forum and the outcome of Council was discussed with my officials at the last Forum meeting on 19 January. Forum members were given a copy of the Hansard of my 12 January statement to the Assembly and the subsequent question and answer session with Members. I am confident, therefore, that they are fully aware of the December Council outcomes. I anticipate that the Forum will take account of these outcomes in developing their recommendations to me which I expect to receive by Easter.

Rural Support Team

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she has any plans to reduce staffing or funding for her Department's Rural Support Team.

(AQW 4506/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD like all other Departments is required to make savings to enable the Executive to work within its budget as well as enable it to address 2010/11 pressures in a strategic manner. My budget proposals to make these savings were presented to the ARD Committee on Tuesday 26 January 2010 as well as being made public. These proposals include one relating to making savings through a review of Rural Enterprise delivery. At this stage I have not made any firm decisions and this position will remain, pending the outcome of the consultation process.

Grants to Assist the Farming Community

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 8802/08, (i) to list the grants, including subsidy schemes, that are available from her Department to assist the farming community; and (ii) to outline the purpose, objectives, time-scale and eligibility criteria for each of these grants.

(AQW 4612/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following table lists the grants and subsidy schemes available to assist the farming community:

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme	Provides direct decoupled income support to farmers.	To provide income support to farmers on condition that certain standards concerning public, animal and plant health, the environment and animal welfare are met, and land maintained in good agricultural and environmental condition. (cross compliance).	Annual (reforms are expected from 2013 onwards).	Applicants must: be a farmer undertaking agricultural activity; hold Payment Entitlements and have eligible agricultural land; declare fields of 0.1 ha or more to activate SFP entitlements (except for Special Entitlements where applicants must maintain the required level of agricultural activity); have the land on which they claim at their disposal on 15 May in the year of the claim. They are also responsible for Cross-Compliance obligations.
Benchmarking	A scheme to facilitate benchmarking of farm and horticultural businesses.	To improve the business management and decision making process on farms. Reduction of costs, efficiency in terms of margin per hectare and quality of produce.	Currently open for applications.	Business ID Number.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Focus Farms	A scheme to promote new technologies and to provide an opportunity for coaching and/or mentoring.	Farmer is paid some monies toward farm enhancement and also for set up and running costs plus allowances for visitors. This is expected to be in the region of £1.7k per farm.	Currently open for applications.	Business ID Number.
Family Farm Options	A scheme that will help farm families to analyse their current business position and to consider the future.	Where implementation of the strategy plan indicates the requirement of further specialist mentoring such as legal/financial input, the associated fees may be supported up to maximum of £250 per farm business.	Currently open for applications.	Business ID Number.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Supply Chain Partnerships (Training)	A scheme to provide training that will promote supply chain partnerships. This Scheme is linked to the Supply Chain Development Programme.	To increase the number of successful new collaborative initiatives in the agri-food and forestry sectors which lead to more effective and sustainable supply chains. This scheme is aimed at primary producers in the agri-food and forestry sectors co-operating with each other and with partners further along their respective supply chains, for example processors, retailers and other end users.	Currently open for applications.	Business ID Number.
Farm Modernisation Programme	To contribute to the competitiveness of agricultural and horticultural businesses in the north of Ireland.	Provide a grant of £5k towards investment in eligible equipment to improve the competitiveness of their enterprise.	The call for applications to Tranche 1 of the Farm Modernisation Programme closed at 4.00 p.m. on Tuesday 31 March 2009	Business ID Number

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances scheme	Contributes to maintaining and promoting sustainable farming systems which in particular take account of environmental protection requirements.	To improve the environment & the countryside by supporting land management.	Operates on an annual cycle. Applied for in March – May through the Single Application process, with payment early the following year.	<p>To claim you must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * have at least 3 hectares of eligible forage land in the SDA and/or DA; * keep enough eligible stock to meet the minimum 0.2 livestock units per hectare (ha) stocking density requirement; * have the land available and accessible to you and meet the stocking density requirement throughout the period of 1 April to 31 October; * adhere to the Cross-Compliance requirements; and undertake to farm in the Less Favoured Area (LFA) for five years from the first payment of a compensatory allowance.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS)	Payments are available to encourage farmers to adopt farming practices which improve the environment and countryside through land management.	To deliver the Programme for Government target: "Increase to 50%, the area of agricultural land in the NI covered by environmental enhancement agreements".	Not currently open for applications.	NICMS is open to all farmers and land managers with a trading DARD Farm Business Identification Number and with at least three hectares of eligible land.
Organic Farming Scheme	To provide payments to help farmers with the additional costs and loss of income which happens during the conversion period to organic production.	To deliver the Programme for Government target: "Increase to 50%, the area of agricultural land in NI covered by environmental enhancement agreements".	Not currently open for applications.	OFS is open to all farmers and land managers with a trading DARD Farm Business Identification Number and with at least one hectare of horticultural land, or not less than 3 hectares of arable or improved or semi-improved land.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
<p>NI Rural Development Programme: Measure 3.1, 3.2 & 3.3</p>	<p>Farmers may avail of funding under these measures which aim to:-</p> <p>Assist farm households to diversify into non-agricultural activities and, as a consequence, maintain or increase the income of farm households and create employment opportunities.</p> <p>Create employment opportunities through promoting entrepreneurship and developing the economic infrastructure in rural areas by providing support to existing micro enterprises or to persons wishing to set up a new micro-enterprise in a non-agricultural sector.</p> <p>Use the natural resources in the north of Ireland's rural areas to attract visitors and create new employment opportunities through the sustainable development of the rural economy by providing support to existing rural tourism enterprises or to persons wishing to set up a new sustainable rural tourism enterprise.</p>	<p>Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure.</p> <p>Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure.</p> <p>Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure.</p> <p>Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure.</p>	<p>Currently open for applications.</p>	<p>Must be compatible with the priorities set in the Local Action Groups approved strategy and approved by that group. In addition as general requirements, projects must not be fulfilling a statutory responsibility/requirement; must not exceed de minimis aid; must not fund production of Annex 1 products; must not replace the funding responsibility of another government department or public body; must be not be double funded; and must fully meet the procurement and expenditure accountability requirements of both the European Commission and the National Government.</p>

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Research Challenge Fund	<p>To provide grants to consortia of industry and research providers to carry out innovative, high quality, pre-commercial research and technological development projects which have the potential to further the sustainability of the north's agri-food and rural enterprises.</p> <p>Funding of up to 50% of eligible project costs will be available.</p>	<p>To improve the competitiveness of rural enterprises and create wealth from the research base in line with DARD Strategic Plan Goals 1 and 2.</p> <p>To increase the number of agricultural and rural enterprises engaging in effective R&D (including those participating for the first time) and the level of private sector expenditure on R&D.</p> <p>To increase the level of collaboration between the north's rural enterprises and the local, national and international research base.</p> <p>To increase collaboration and effective cooperation between rural enterprises.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that the scheme will open for applications during March/April 2010.</p> <p>Funding is currently available until 31 March 2011.</p>	<p>Projects must be collaborative i.e. all project partners participate in the design of the project, contribute to its implementation and share the risk and the output of the project.</p> <p>The industry partner will be either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> an SME representative body or levy body; a group of SMEs; or a group involving a large enterprise and one or more SMEs operating in the north. <p>The research partner will typically be a public sector research organisation in the north of Ireland, Britain or the south of Ireland.</p>

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Biomass Processing Challenge Fund	To support the purchase of a range of technologies that improve business efficiency and sustainability at farm level to produce renewable energy.	To increase the adoption of renewable energy technology at farm level. To increase demand for biomass feedstocks. Displacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy.	It is anticipated that the scheme will open in 2010.	Under development.
Agriculture and Forestry Processing and Marketing Grant	Improves economic performance and international competitiveness and encourages integration.	To improve the economic performance and international competitiveness of the north's agri-food processing, horticulture and forestry sectors through use of technology together with sound manufacturing and environment management practices. To encourage greater integration and collaboration between producers and processors.	Currently open for applications.	Any micro-, small, medium or intermediate-sized enterprises with fewer than 750 employees involved in processing and marketing. Forestry Sector: Applications from the forestry sector are limited to micro-enterprises only.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Agriculture and Forestry Marketing Development Grant	Improves economic performance and international competitiveness.	To provide support to agri-food and forestry sector businesses seeking to improve their economic performance and international competitiveness.	Currently open for applications.	<p>The Scheme is open to micro-, small, medium and intermediate-sized enterprises involved or wishing to become involved in marketing including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • processors; • groups of producers who market their produce collaboratively; • individual producers who want to market their own produce; and • trade associations or industry bodies. <p>However, any applicant must be a separate legal entity. Also, in the case of the forestry sector the Scheme is limited to micro-enterprises.</p>

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Supply Chain Development Programme	Improves co-operation and collaboration leading to more effective and sustainable supply chains.	<p>To improve co-operation and collaboration in the agri-food and forestry sectors leading to more effective and sustainable supply chains.</p> <p>Support will facilitate co-operation and collaboration in supply chains between producers, processors and others.</p> <p>Support will facilitate the development of ideas and initiatives that improve the effectiveness and sustainability of supply chains.</p> <p>Support will facilitate the development of new supply chain relationships.</p>	Currently open for applications.	Groups with two or more businesses from the agriculture, horticulture or forestry supply chains are eligible to apply to the Supply Chain Development Programme. Groups must consist of farmers/growers but may also include processors and/or other suppliers of the produce of agriculture, horticulture or forestry.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
<p>NI Rural Development Programme: Measures 3.4, 3.5 & 3.6</p>	<p>Rural dwellers may avail of funding under these measures which aim to:- Support the improvement of basic services in rural areas, including cultural and leisure facilities and related small-scale infrastructure. Support animation and capacity-building within and between villages and their surrounding rural areas in the formulation of integrated action plans to define the role of the village and fully develop the potential of villages and their surrounding areas. Use the natural resources in the north of Ireland's rural areas to create new employment opportunities and develop the rural economy through supporting local village initiatives to preserve and upgrade their rural heritage.</p>	<p>Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure. Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure. Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the measure.</p>	<p>Currently open for applications.</p>	<p>Must be compatible with the priorities set in the Local Action Groups approved strategy and approved by that group. In addition as general requirements, projects must not be fulfilling a statutory responsibility/requirement; must not exceed de minimis aid; must not fund production of Annex 1 products; must not replace the funding responsibility of another government department or public body; must be not be double funded; and must fully meet the procurement and expenditure accountability requirements of both the European Commission and the National Government.</p>

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Anti-Poverty / Social Exclusion	<p>Rural dwellers may avail of funding under these schemes which aim to:-</p> <p>Improve childcare provision in rural areas.</p> <p>Improve access to transport for rural disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Combat rural fuel poverty.</p> <p>Facilitate rural community and voluntary groups in addressing local poverty and social exclusion issues.</p> <p>Encourage rural community development.</p>	Achievement of one or more of the outputs and results and/or impacts set for the scheme.	All schemes are currently active.	Eligibility varies by scheme.
European Fisheries Fund (Aquaculture Measure)	To support investments in the construction, extension, equipping and modernisation of aquaculture production installations, in particular with a view to improving working conditions, hygiene, human or animal health and product quality, reducing negative impact or enhancing positive effects on the environment.	<p>To support the growth and diversification of aquaculture, inland fishing, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products, thereby improving profitability and competitiveness; and</p> <p>To promote improvements in production standards, environmental and welfare performance</p>	Aug 2009 – Dec 2013	<p>Grant support is limited to:-</p> <p>(a) licensed aquaculture businesses;</p> <p>(b) micro, small and medium sized enterprises</p>

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme	To encourage the consumption of milk products by making them available in schools at reduced cost.	To implement EU legislation which requires Member States to offer subsidised milk products to nursery, primary and secondary school children. A national subsidy is also paid.	Open	Participation by schools is at the discretion of school management. Participating schools liaise with relevant Education and Library Board who prepare claims for schools in their area.
Woodland Grant Scheme	Encourage expansion of tree cover in the north.	To provide assistance for creation of new woodlands through capital grants.	Open for applications all year round. Period of commitment - 20 years for mainly conifer and 30 for broadleaved woodland.	Minimum application area is 0.2 ha with a minimum width of 20 metres.
Farm Woodland Premium Scheme	Encourage expansion of tree cover in the north.	To provide assistance for creation of new woodland by compensating for agricultural income foregone.	Open for applications all year round. Period of commitment - 20 years for mainly conifer and 30 for broadleaved woodland.	Applicants must be running an agricultural business, and the land to be planted must have been in agricultural use for three years with a minimum area of 1.0 hectare.

Name of Grant/Subsidy Scheme to Assist Farming Community	Purpose of Grant/Subsidy	Objective of Grant/Subsidy	Time-scale	Eligibility Criteria
Short Rotation Coppice Scheme 2007	Increase the amount of Short Rotation Coppice grown for an energy end use in the north.	To provide assistance toward the cost of establishing Short Rotation Coppice.	Open for applications all year round. Five year commitment.	Available to those on agricultural holdings, with suitable land and a minimum area of 3.0 ha. Applicants must also demonstrate an energy end use for the crop.
Woodland Environment Grant	Encourage good management of existing woodlands.	To assist woodland owners to manage their woodland in a way that will contribute to the north's targets within the Biodiversity Action Plan, or improve the public amenity of their woodland.	Open for applications all year round. Period of commitment is dependant on nature and duration of project.	Minimum application area is 1.0 ha.
Sustainable Forest Operations Grant	Encourage good management of existing woodlands.	To provide a contribution toward the cost of eligible investments that will secure significant environmental benefits from the woodland.	Open for applications all year round. Period of commitment is dependant on nature and duration of project.	Minimum application area is 1.0 ha.

Red Meat Promotional Week

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that it is Red Meat Promotional Week, what assistance her Department is giving to the meat industry to promote their produce to the general public.

(AQW 4619/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Strict EU State Aid rules place severe constraints on the use of Government funds for promotional activities for local produce. Therefore DARD cannot provide direct funding for the marketing or advertising of red meat in the north of Ireland.

The promotion of red meat in both domestic and international markets is the responsibility of the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC). In addition to their ongoing promotional work, I understand that for the 'Red Meat Week' the LMC planned a range of activities including supermarket sampling; radio and press competitions; schools competitions and an inaugural Meat Academy where participants have the opportunity to learn more about NI Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) Beef.

My Department, in conjunction with InvestNI, operates the NI Regional Food Programme (NIRFP), which provides financial support to 'not for profit' agri-food groups, to help promote quality regional food. Through groups who benefited from this programme, local red meat companies have had the opportunity to avail of promotional and sales opportunities at events such as the Balmoral Show Food Pavilion; the Fermanagh County Show Food Festival and the Glenarm Highland Games. The NIRFP is also part-funding Food NI's stand at the upcoming IFEX exhibition which offers further opportunities for red meat companies to promote their produce.

Code of Practice Between UK Supermarkets and Producers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of the code of practice between UK mainland supermarkets and producers which ensures that producers obtain a fair price for their produce; and if she has any plans to promote a similar code here.

(AQW 4661/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The recent introduction of a Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP) is a reserved matter and therefore not within my remit. However, I do welcome the introduction of this Code which applies to all retail groceries in Britain and the north of Ireland with an annual turnover in excess of £1 billion. Also, as I support fully the concept of fair pricing, I welcome the British Government's acceptance in principle of the need for a body to enforce the GSCOP (normally referred to as a "Supermarket Ombudsman") and the fact that it is currently consulting on the nature of such a body and what powers it might have. These are important developments which I hope will contribute positively to farmers receiving a fair deal.

Rural Development Support Teams

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her plans for the Rural Development Support Teams, including whether she intends to maintain their current level of resources.

(AQW 4750/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is required to make savings so that it can work within its budget and address the 2010/11 pressures in a strategic manner. My budget proposals to make these savings, includes one relating to a review of the work undertaken by the Rural Enterprise team. At this stage I have not made any firm decisions and this position will remain, pending the outcome of the consultation process outlined in the Review of 2010-11 Spending Plans for all Departments. I shall be taking on board the views expressed by stakeholders and others, which will collectively inform the final proposals I will take to the Executive.

Rural Development Programme

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why her Department failed to provide match funding for Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme.

(AQO 752/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Both the delivery mechanism and the delivery areas for the Axis were new, and therefore new and robust foundations needed to be put in place for the Axis to be delivered. This included animation of the new areas, competition and appointment of new Local Action Groups and development of necessary infrastructures and supports and controls required to enable effective delivery. When the budget was established 3 years ago the various measures making up Axis 3 had not been fully designed. The administrative structures had not been put in place and it was not possible to estimate demand.

The Executive's Review of Public Expenditure provides the first opportunity to update the planning assumptions and allocations for 2010-11 that were made in the 2008 budget.

I propose to make an additional allocation of £5million National Capital Grant to increase the funding available for Axis 3, where a number of applications have now been brought forward and demand is now evident.

So far Joint Council Committees have approved 298 applications for grant aid worth £8.2million which were assessed by Local Action Groups. Of this, letters of offer worth around £4m have issued to project sponsors.

Forest Service Land in Carrickfergus

Mr D Hilditch asked Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much land in the Carrickfergus Borough Council area is currently under the management of the Forest Service.

(AQO 756/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Forest Service manages 835 hectares of forest, of which 743 hectares are on land owned by NI Water in Woodburn forest.

Necarne Equestrian Centre

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if a date has been confirmed with Fermanagh District Council for her Department's withdrawal from the Necarne Equestrian Centre, following the Audit Office report on the Irish Sport Horse Genetic Testing Unit Ltd.

(AQO 758/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A date of the 31 March 2012 has been agreed in principle with Fermanagh District Council for the withdrawal by my Department from the Necarne Equestrian Centre subject to the following conditions: -

1. My Department will maintain Necarne in its existing state and remain responsible for security, maintenance and rates for the Centre up until 31 March 2012;
2. My Department will remove from the Centre horses and items associated with equines to the value of around £60,000 by the withdrawal date;
3. My Department will permit the Council to market the Necarne Estate on the open market during the time up to the date of withdrawal; and
4. The Agreement to withdraw from Necarne will be financially neutral to DARD and the Council and that no monies will be paid to or received from either party.

This withdrawal is also subject to the necessary capital resource being available

Forestry Production

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if her Department has any land for sale which could be used for forestry production.

(AQO 759/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department currently has land for sale at Enniskillen and Cookstown. However, it is not suitable for forestry production.

Forestry Bill

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the key elements of the Forestry Bill.

(AQO 760/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Key elements

The Bill will carry forward many of the existing key provisions such as the traditional and primary purpose of timber production and the powers to conduct everyday operations but will reflect the wider economic, environmental and social context of modern forestry. It will also introduce a range of powers such as:-

- development of forest land for other purposes than forestry to obtain better value from the public estate – this could include, for example, renewable energy projects or the development of tourist facilities on forestry land;
- the introduction of felling and regeneration licences to promote the sustainability of woodlands;
- a statutory right of pedestrian access to forestry land;
- powers to compulsorily acquire land to provide access to landlocked timber, or access for other functions, but only after all reasonable alternative options have been exhausted;
- powers to protect woodlands from damage by wild animals.

My officials are continuing to engage with the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on the detail of the Bill.

EU Fisheries Council

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she is progressing the outcome of the December Fisheries Council meeting.

(AQO 761/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I said in my statement to the Assembly on 12 January, the December Fisheries Council negotiations started with a proposal to cut prawn Total Allowable Catch, or TAC, by 30% and we ended up with a 9% cut. Since then, by working with the industry and with the south we have reduced that further. When all is considered, the prawn quota available at the start of this year will be just 4% less than the total amount caught in 2009. There may be the opportunity for further quota swaps during the year and we should bear in mind that even with this cut Nephrops quota remains above the long term levels which existed up to 2006. Along with fish quotas, the fishing effort available in 2010 was also agreed at the December Council. As expected this was in line with the Cod Recovery Plan and there was a 25% cut in Irish Sea effort. The Cod Recovery Plan gives us very little flexibility and in order to maintain fishing time vessels will have to adopt cod conservation measures. I have therefore agreed that in 2010 the basic days at sea allowances are 124 days for whitefish vessels and 130 days for prawn vessels. More days are available if vessels adopt practices that result in lower cod catches, such as complying with additional closed fishing areas and adopting gears that allow cod to escape. Up to 200 days are available for vessels that adopt measures that result in less than 5% cod catch per trip. If vessels adopt sufficient cod conservations measures, which I hope they will, they will have enough time to catch the quotas available.

Loss of Local Potato Crop

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions her Department has had with the Tayto company about the potential loss of one third of the local potato crop.

(AQO 762/10)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date (Monday 8 February @ 12.00 a.m.) there has been no approach by the Tayto company to my Department to discuss losses in the local potato crop.

However, officials from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise carried out advisory visits to three growers who supply potatoes to Tayto on 19 & 20 of January, and discussed the management of frost damaged crops.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Projects in Upper Bann

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the projects in which his Department has invested, in the Upper Bann Constituency, in each of the last three years; and the funding allocated to each project.

(AQW 4459/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr N McCausland): The information requested is detailed in the following tables.

TABLE 1 - 2006-07

Project Funded by	Project	Amount (£)
NI Museums Council	Contribution to costs of UV film (Craigavon Museum Service)	387
DCAL	Development of Kernan Lough (Peace II Project)	2,174
DCAL	Development of Fishing Facilities at Craigavon Lakes	91,194
DCAL	Replacement Bridge at Maghery Canal	146,441
Arts Council of NI	Art Work for New Mental Health Facility (Craigavon & Banbridge Community Health & Social Services Trust)	64,826
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Mid Armagh Community Network)	23,000
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	40,788
Arts Council of NI	Opening Eyes & Minds (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	16,247
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Eddie Rafferty)	500
Arts Council of NI	Making It – Artist in Residency (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	21,000
Arts Council of NI	Start Up and Residency (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	22,500
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Edel Magill)	900
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Gary Duffy)	5,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (David Lyttle)	300

Project Funded by	Project	Amount (£)
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Victor Sloan)	2,702
Arts Council of NI	Reimaging Craigavon Communities (Craigavon Borough Council)	44,000
Arts Council of NI	Three Exhibitions Project (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	20,700
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Holger Christian Lonze)	4,000
Arts Council of NI	Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme (Mullabrack Accordion Band)	4,594
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Barry Brendan Kerr)	3,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Julie McGowan)	3,000
SELB	Roller Shutters (Brownlow Library)	7,856
SELB	General Minor Works (Lurgan Library)	33,264

TABLE 2 - 2007-08

Project Funded by	Project	Amount (£)
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Mid Armagh Community Network)	23,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Jonathan Cardwell)	400
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	40,788
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Jonathan Toman)	1,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Feargal O'Malley)	1,240
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Stevie Scullion)	2,000
SELB	Windows & Painting (Banbridge Library)	35,300
SELB	General Minor Works (Lurgan Library)	3,420
Sport NI	Artificial Pitches & Equipment (Waringstown Cricket Club)	40,000

TABLE 3 - 2008-09

Project Funded by	Project	Amount (£)
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Millennium Court Arts Centre)	51,000
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (All Set Cross Cultural Project)	25,000
Arts Council of NI	Annual Support for Organisations Programme (Mid Armagh Community Network)	23,000
Arts Council of NI	Community Based Shared Future Projects (Craigavon Borough Council)	50,000

Project Funded by	Project	Amount (£)
Arts Council of NI	Reimaging in Brownlow, Portadown & Lurgan (Craigavon Borough Council)	95,250
Arts Council of NI	Reimaging Project Management (Craigavon Borough Council)	17,000
Arts Council of NI	Brownlow Linear Park Phase II (Craigavon Borough Council)	50,000
Arts Council of NI	Portadown Community Treatment & Care Centre (Southern Health & Social Care Trust)	35,130
Arts Council of NI	Continuation of our arts programme (Donaghcloney Rural Needs Development Group)	36,763
Arts Council of NI	Ulster Drama Festival (Association of Ulster Drama Festivals)	10,100
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Dean Patrick Warner)	2,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Jimmy McAleavey)	4,000
Arts Council of NI	Garden of Reminiscence (Drumbeg North & South Residents Association)	15,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Brendan Fitzpatrick)	1,200
Arts Council of NI	Purchase of Musical Instruments (Clogher Youth & Music Club)	3,750
Arts Council of NI	Performances & Educational Outreach Projects (Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra Association)	10,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Holger Christian Lonze)	2,050
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Jamie Guiney)	1,600
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Eimear McGeown)	5,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Barry McSherry)	2,000
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Laura Kerr)	2,500
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Julie McGowan)	2,200
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Rob Durston)	600
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (Dougal McKenzie)	1,586
Arts Council of NI	Support for Individual Artist Programme (David Lyttle)	400
SELB	Wall Removal, New Carpet, Furniture & Shelving (Banbridge Library)	25,790
SELB	Asbestos Removal & Painting (Brownlow Library)	3,815
SELB	Kitchen Refurbishment (Lurgan Library)	38,180
Sport NI	Soccer Strategy Playing Facilities Programme (Annagh United FC)	84,872
Sport NI	Construction of GAA pitches, floodlights & fencing (Taghnevan Sports Limited)	245,000
Sport NI	Upgrade of rugby & training pitches (Lurgan RFC & Cricket Club)	126,093
NI Museums Council	Conservation Survey of Paper Items in Collection (Craigavon Museum Service)	455

Organisation of Large-scale Events

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has any plans to transfer the organisation of large-scale events from his Department to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; and if so, when.

(AQW 4554/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The department does not directly organise large-scale events itself, but does assist in the delivery of such events by supporting others in their organisation, through financial support, or by establishing partnerships to coordinate their delivery. The functions formerly exercised by the Northern Ireland Events Company are, following a recommendation from the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland, proposed to transfer from my Department to the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment subject to Executive approval.

Proposed Orange Museums

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the potential cultural contribution of the proposed Orange museums in Loughgall and Belfast.

(AQW 4614/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I welcome this initiative that is being taken forward by the Orange Order. It can only help to increase understanding of the Orange tradition and contribute to a shared and better future in Northern Ireland.

The Order has an unparalleled historical collection of material relating to Orangeism and the Order's REACH Project (Reaching out through Education And Cultural Heritage) aims to secure funding for 2 museums enabling preservation, interpretation and access to the collection.

I commend and endorse this approach and wish the Order every success with these two museum projects.

Fisheries (Amendment No. 2) Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2004

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to specify the changes introduced under Statutory Rule No 504, Fisheries (Amendment No. 2) Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2004; and to detail any consultations his Department held prior to introducing this Statutory Rule.

(AQW 4664/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In 2005 the Department re-defined the area on Lower Lough Erne where fishing ground bait and maggots were permitted.

Before introducing the amendment above, the Department consulted with the Fisheries Conservancy Board which was at that time, the representative stakeholder Forum for salmon and inland fisheries interests. The Board approved the change to the ground bait and maggots line on the 23rd March 2004.

Subsequently, the Board introduced the Fisheries (Amendment No.2) Byelaws 2004 (S.R. 504) which re-aligned the Lower Lough Erne area on which a coarse fishing licence was valid, with the new ground bait and maggots line. As this amendment was considered a consequential change following on from the already approved new ground bait and maggots line, no further consultation was considered necessary.

Other changes introduced by Statutory Rule No. 504 included an increase in fishing licence duties, amendment to the River Lagan and Lough Money coarse fish areas and the creation of two new rainbow trout waters.

London 2012 Olympics

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any meetings he has planned for the next six months aimed at ensuring Northern Ireland can benefit from the London 2012 Olympics. **(AQW 4692/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department leads and co-ordinates Northern Ireland's response to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. I chair a Northern Ireland 2012 Leadership Group that provides strategic direction, advice and guidance to ensure that NI maximises the unique opportunities presented by the Games and the delivery of a sporting, social and economic legacy. The 2012 Leadership Group meets 3 times per year with the next meeting scheduled for 5 May 2010. Membership includes the Chairpersons from Arts Council NI, Disability Sport NI, SportNI, NITB, InvestNI, and senior representatives from the Department of Education NI, Department of Employment and Learning NI, Local Government, the Volunteer Development Agency and a NI VIP Ambassador.

Senior Officials from DCAL are represented on the Nations and Regions Group (NRG) of the London Organising Committee for the Games. This forum meetings on a regular basis and consists of representatives from the 9 English regions and 3 nations of the UK. Involvement ensures that Northern Ireland is kept up to date about opportunities for participating in and benefitting from the 2012 Games and to learn and share with colleagues across the UK any best practice in relation to 2012 activity and wider legacy programmes.

William Kennedy International Piping Festival

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why he refused an application for funding under the Events Growth Fund for the William Kennedy International Piping Festival in 2010, given that an economic impact survey by Armagh City and District Council found that this festival has contributed significantly to the Armagh economy in the past. **(AQW 4805/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Applications to my department's events funding schemes are assessed against an objective criteria which while taking the economic benefit an event may deliver into account, also considers the contribution the proposed event makes to the delivery of a number of other objectives. I understand a proposal has to deliver across the range of criteria to be eligible for funding.

A number of applications have been made to the Events Growth Fund and Major Events Fund. Successful applicants have been advised and those that have been unsuccessful have had an opportunity to appeal. Until such appeals have been considered I am unable to comment on individual cases.

Community Arts

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the criteria used to classify groups as 'Community Arts Organisations' for funding purposes. **(AQO 768/10)**

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the body responsible for disbursing DCAL's funding for community arts. It does not have dedicated budgets for particular art form areas, but rather allocates funding on the basis of applications received from organisations and individuals.

The Arts Council classifies a group as a community arts organisation by analysing where its activities take place and who the beneficiaries are. It considers community arts to be about local people having access to and being able to participate in their chosen medium of art from the spectrum of art forms.

Community arts is a process. It harnesses the transformative power of original artistic expression to produce a range of social, cultural and environmental benefits. It provides opportunities for

communities and participants to develop their own skills as artists as well as for artists to explore ways of transferring those skills.

Government funding of the arts cannot be narrow and exclusive – it must be as broad and inclusive as possible.

Providers of community arts range from large established arts organisations to small community-based groups at the grass roots. The range of settings is broad, including arts centres, community centres, neighbourhood halls, prisons, youth centres and public spaces.

Strangford Lough

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efforts his Department has made to enhance and promote the sporting and recreational potential of Strangford Lough.

(AQO 769/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Strangford Lough is recognised as a major resource for sport and recreation. Consequently, Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), which is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding, works closely with relevant stakeholders to assist in maximising the sporting and recreational potential of the Lough.

In that role, SNI has provided support to the Countryside Access and Activities Network for the development of the Strangford Lough Canoe Trail. It has also assisted Strangford Lough Yacht Club in developing sailing activities and is represented on the Strangford Lough Management and Advisory Committee which advises on the strategic management of Strangford Lough. In addition, SNI, through the Tollymore Mountain Centre, has helped the governing body for canoeing here, the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland, with the development and running of the annual Strangford Challenge Kayaking Marathon.

Community Arts

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he can provide an assurance that budget cuts within his Department will not have a detrimental impact on the work of community based arts organisations.

(AQO 770/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department and its arms length bodies will continue to support community based arts organisations to find appropriate funding and maximise value for money.

However, there is a need to be realistic about the funding which will be available. We are in a very tight public expenditure climate and funding for the arts, like all areas of Government expenditure, has been reduced for 2010/11 and will be under increasing pressure going forward.

Given these pressures, it is important to recognise that community organisations cannot rely solely on central government funding. Local government must take responsibility by prioritising arts funding and addressing the huge gap between the council areas which provide most and least funding per person for the arts.

The Arts Council will need to consider all future applications for funding from community arts organisations in the context of DCAL and Arts Council strategies, and in light of its revised budget allocations.

Irish Language Strategy

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number and type of engagements that his Department has undertaken with Irish language organisations in the last two years in relation to the development of an Irish Language Strategy.

(AQO 772/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Representatives from my Department have met with Irish language organisations on seven occasions on issues relating to the Minority Languages Strategy in the last two years. This includes:

- 4 meetings with Pobal – 24 January 2008, 30 September 2008, 4 June 2009 and 19 October 2009.
- 2 meetings with Foras na Geailge – 24 January 2008 and 28 October 2008.
- A meeting with the Irish Guild of the Church of Ireland – 19 January 2009.

These meetings were consultative in nature.

I have also met with Irish language organisations such as An Gaeláras in Londonderry and An Cultúllann in West Belfast.

In addition I visited the Gaelic college on the Isle of Skye to attain another view of language development and that will help to inform the Strategy.

Furthermore, I recently met with the Education Minister to discuss the linkages between education and the Language Strategy - particularly with respect to cultural identity in the classroom, the delivery of children's rights and appropriate training and creative training materials for teachers.

Sport and Physical Activity

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how his Department's revised budget will impact on the promotion of sport and physical activity.

(AQO 773/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department's proposed budget for 2010/11 gives Sport NI an uplift of £2m in its resource budget as compared to 2009/10, an increase of 23%. It is also being allocated a £7m increase in its capital budget above that originally indicated in CSR 2008/11.

The proposed increase in the indicative 2010/11 Sport NI resource and capital budgets represents a significant investment in sport at a time of financial stringency and will assist in the meeting the Executive's and the Department's PSA targets.

The indicative allocations notified to DCAL's Arms Length Bodies are provisional and may be subject to adjustment, either upwards or downwards, following the period of consultation on the draft budget.

Milwaukee Irish Fest

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department will reconsider its approach to the Milwaukee Irish Fest 2010, given that this festival is North America's largest celebration of Irish music and culture.

(AQO 774/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster-Scots Agency has been approached by the organisers of the Milwaukee Irish Fest and the Agency plans to support the event in 2010. The Agency's Board have agreed to set aside £7,000 to facilitate funding for the event. An open tender exercise will be carried out to identify a suitable group to showcase Ulster-Scots.

I remain supportive of celebrating links with America and for musicians from all backgrounds in Northern Ireland to showcase their talent on the international stage and access new networks and industry connections.

To this end the Arts Council schemes which facilitate artists travelling to America and the Creative Industries Innovation Fund will continue to support these types of activities.

Cultural Links with Scotland

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the ongoing work by his Department to strengthen cultural links with Scotland.

(AQO 775/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am committed to the enhancement and promotion of Northern Ireland's shared cultural, historical and social connections with Scotland. A number of initiatives and programmes have been undertaken by my Department, through its associated arms length bodies to develop and indeed strengthen our cultural links.

Some examples of these are set out below.

- The Ulster-Scots Agency is involved with several Scottish Local Authorities who have participated in schools exchange programmes.
- DCAL through Foras na Gaeilge supports the Colmcille Initiative which fosters support for the Gaelic languages and develops links between Gaelic Scotland and Ireland.
- I have also held discussions with Scottish Government Ministers and Academics on a number of initiatives such as the Scottish Language Dictionaries Project and the Kist o Riches project which is an exciting and innovative project which aims to digitise, catalogue and disseminate Gaelic and Scots sound recordings online.
- The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has ongoing contact with the Scottish Arts Council, including regular meetings at various levels which aim to strengthen and develop cultural links. Recently, the two Arts Councils have been exploring literary development on an East-West basis in conjunction with the Scottish Book Trust and Scottish Poetry Library.
- Links between Northern Ireland and Scotland in relation to literary festivals, Ulster-Scots festivals and storytelling traditions are also currently being developed.
- The Arts Council also takes part in UK wide initiatives in collaboration with all four UK Arts Councils, for example an international touring fund which has brought the Scottish Opera and Ballet to the Grand Opera House.
- Northern Ireland Screen has awarded £126,000 to partly fund a documentary series entitled 'Dissenting Voices'. The series is scheduled to be broadcast in 2010 on both BBC NI and TG4 and will illustrate what life was like on both sides of the Irish Sea at the time of the plantation of Ulster.

Irish Language Strategy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the main elements of the Irish Language Strategy.

(AQO 776/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Since coming into office at the beginning of July 2009, I have given special attention to the development of a Minority Languages Strategy.

It is my intention to bring forward a draft Strategy to the Executive by the end of March which can then go out to consultation.

One strand of this Strategy will be to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language as set out in Section 15 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews) Act 2006.

The preparation of this draft Minority Languages Strategy will require engagement with, and commitments from, a number of other Northern Ireland Executive departments - especially in relation to education - and from the United Kingdom government in relation to broadcasting.

Arts Funding

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the recent funding cuts to the arts sector and the potential to negate the benefits of previous capital investment in the arts.

(AQO 777/10)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL and the Arts Council have made a significant investment in the capital arts infrastructure in Northern Ireland in recent years. A number of venues opened in 2009 including the Playhouse, Waterside Theatre and An Gaelaras in Londonderry and two venues will open in Belfast in 2010/11 – the Crescent and Lyric Theatres.

DCAL continues to invest in this area and work on the new Metropolitan Arts Centre for St Anne's Square started in December 2009.

The projects already completed provide artists, the local community and visitors with excellent venues to participate in and enjoy a wide spectrum of the Arts.

Arts Council will continue to support venues and artists on behalf of DCAL, in line with Departmental priorities.

Department of Education

Former Faughan Valley School, Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education if she would consider the former Faughan Valley School site, Derry, as a location for a Meanscoil.

(AQW 4311/10)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): The former Faughan Valley School site remains in the ownership of the Western Education and Library Board (WELB). It is therefore a matter for that Board to determine its future use or disposal.

Chomhairligh Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlaine an Iarthair (WELB) nár cuireadh in iúl aon spéis i bpríomhshuíomh an choláiste agus tá sé beartaithe ag an WELB é a chur de lámh ar an mhargadh oscailte. Tá díospóireachtaí faoi bhealach maidir le suim Chomhairle Cathrach Dhoire i bpáirceanna imeartha na seanscoile a cheannach.

The WELB has advised that there has been no Public Sector or educational interest expressed in the main college site and the WELB therefore intends to dispose of it on the open market. Discussions regarding Derry City Council's interest in acquiring the former school's playing fields are on-going. However, on foot of your question I have today written to CnaG to suggest that they write directly to the WELB to lodge an interest in the site if considered an appropriate location for the development of a new Meanscoil.

Schools Funding

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the amount of funding provided by her Department to (a) preparatory schools of fee-paying grammar schools; (b) Catholic maintained schools; and (c) Irish-medium schools; (ii) the number of such institutions in Northern Ireland; and (iii) the number of pupils who attended each type of institution, in the academic year 2008/09.

(AQW 4466/10)

Minister of Education: The Independent Strategic Review of Education (known as the Bain Report), published in December 2006, highlighted the issue of the funding of Preparatory Schools. In respect of the allocation of the education budget, it stated: "Equity must continue to be at the heart of this distribution. For this reason, the part-funding of fee-charging preparatory departments in grammar schools is anomalous. This aspect of delegation subsidises provision that can only be accessed by

children whose parents can pay the requisite fee. This would seem to be an inequitable use of public funds and counterintuitive in a funding system simultaneously managing the pressures of a high level of surplus capacity. The rationale for this aspect of schools-related current expenditure should be reviewed and its continuation considered with regard to equity and in the context of the significant pressures on the education budget”.

One of the key recommendations of the Bain Report (recommendation 5) was that:

“The rationale for funding preparatory departments in grammar schools should be reviewed”.

The Equality Commission has adopted a position where it considers that a key component of a quality education system is the provision of equality of access to good education. In relation to its position on the funding of Preparatory Departments, the Commission has stated that:

“Preparatory Departments inherently do not provide equality of access as attendance is dependant on a parents /families ability to pay additional substantial costs. We do not believe a public subvention to this sector is the best possible use of public funds when there are other areas that we have prioritised for intervention in the above document”. (“Above document” refers to Every Child an Equal Child)

Faigheann scoileanna cistiú ar bhonn bliana airgeadais in ionad ar bhonn bliana acadúla. Tá an t-eolas atá soláthraithe thíos don bhliain airgeadais 2008/2009, i leith daltaí coibhéiseacha lánaimseartha (FTEanna), bunaithe ar shonraí daonáirimh Dheireadh Fómhair 2007.

Schools receive funding on a financial year rather than an academic year basis. The information provided below is for the 2008/2009 financial year, for funded full-time equivalent pupils (FTEs), based on October 2007 census data.

	2008/09 Funding £'000 ⁽³⁾	Number of Institutions Funded	Number of Funded FTE Pupils
Preparatory Departments of grammar schools	1,905	16	2,411
Catholic Maintained Schools ⁽¹⁾	400,324	508	117,986
Irish-medium Schools ⁽²⁾	8,768	23	2,616

Notes:

- (1) Catholic Maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools
- (2) Irish-medium primary and secondary schools
- (3) Funding information based on Outturn figures provided by the relevant Funding Authority, based on the 2008/09 financial year.

Number of Classrooms for New Build Schools

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of her Department’s policy of deciding the appropriate number of classrooms for new build schools based on long-term enrolment figures. **(AQW 4489/10)**

Minister of Education: Schedules of accommodation for Primary schools are calculated on the basis of Long Term Enrolment (LTE) bands. For example, a new Primary school with a LTE of 176-205 would have an entitlement of 7 teaching spaces and other ancillary accommodation as detailed in the Primary Schools Building Handbook. Details of all the enrolment bands and associated schedules of accommodation can be found in Section 3 of the Handbook. This can be found on the DE website

and can be accessed using the following link: www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/13-schools_estate_pg/13-content-buildinghandbook/13-schools_estate_primary_pg.htm

Cuireann méid agus nádúr na cóiríochta múinteoireachta le bheith soláthraithe i bhfoirgnimh nua iar-bhunscoileanna riachtanas an churaclaim sa tuaisceart san áireamh agus cinntear é trí fhoirmle a chuireann roinnt fachtóirí san áireamh, lena n-áirítear (i) rollú fadtéarma faofa; (ii) cóimheas daltaí le múinteoirí; (iii) cóimheas teagmhála chun an chothromhaíocht idir am múinteoireachta amchláraithe agus am neamhmhúinteoireachta a chur san áireamh; agus (iv) Fachtóir Úsáide Seomra a cheadaíonn solúbthacht le haghaidh amchláraithe agus chun trealamh teagaisc a ullmhú idir ranganna.

The extent and nature of teaching accommodation to be provided in new build Post-Primary schools takes account of the requirement of the Curriculum in the north and is determined by a formula that takes account of a number of factors including (i) the approved LTE; (ii) the Pupil Teacher Ratio; (iii) a Contact Ratio to take account of the balance between time-tabled teaching time and non-teaching time; and (iv) a Room Usage Factor which allows flexibility for timetabling and the setting up of teaching equipment between classes.

These arrangements have been operation for a number of years and are deemed to be fair and equitable to schools in all sectors.

Cheating in Exams

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of recorded incidents of pupils cheating in (a) GCSE; and (b) A level exams in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4534/10)

Minister of Education: Dhíreoinn aird an Chomhalta ar an fhreagra a thug mé do Thomas Burns MLA (Aontroim Theas) ar AQW 4517/10 a foilsíodh sa Tuairisc Oifigiúil ar 12 Feabhra 2010 a mhionsonraíonn an t-eolas seo.

I refer the Member to the answer I provided to Thomas Burns MLA (South Antrim) to AQW 4517/10 published in the Official Report on 12 February 2010 which details this information.

Number of Schools

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the current number of (i) nursery schools; (ii) primary schools; and (iii) secondary (a) high schools; (b) grammar schools; and (c) Irish-medium schools in each Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 4560/10)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh sonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

School type	ELB					Total
	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	
Nursery schools	32	15	19	20	12	98
Irish medium primary schools	8	4	2	2	6	22
Primary schools (non-Irish medium)	85	207	154	221	177	844
Irish medium post-primary	1	0	0	0	0	1
Post-primary (non-Irish medium)	18	35	27	38	31	149
Grammar	16	16	10	14	13	69

Nursery, primary and post primary schools by Education and Library Board – 2009/10

There are a number of Irish medium voluntary and private pre-school centres, as well as a number of Irish medium units situated in primary and post-primary schools. These units have been included in the counts of schools in the table above. They are shown separately in the table below.

School type	ELB					Total
	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	
Irish medium units in primary schools	0	1	1	5	2	9
Irish medium units in post-primary schools	0	0	0	1	1	2
Irish medium voluntary and private pre-school centres	6	8	3	10	8	35

Source: school census

Note: Figures for primary schools (non-Irish medium) include 17 preparatory departments in grammar schools.

School Closures During the Recent Cold Spell

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education how many pupils were kept home from school as a result of school closures during the recent cold spell.

(AQW 4577/10)

Minister of Education: Chuaigh druidimí scoile i bhfeidhm ar thuairim is 21,000 dalta mar gheall ar fhadhbanna a bhaineann le coinníollacha drochaimsire i mí na Nollag agus i mí Eanáir.

Approximately 21,000 pupils were affected by school closures due to problems associated with the adverse weather conditions in December and January.

For details of each school that was closed and the length of closures I would refer the Member to the answer I provided to AQW 4127/10 tabled by Thomas Burns MLA and published in the Official Report on 05 February 2010.

Former Faughan Valley School, Derry

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education if it is her Department or the Western Education and Library Board that has the authority to gift the former Faughan Valley School for use as a Meanscoil.

(AQW 4594/10)

Minister of Education: Tá iarscoil Faughan Valley faoi uinéireacht Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair (BOLI). Faoi Alt 106(5) den Ordú um Oideachas agus Leabharlanna 1986, ní féidir le BOLI aon talamh ná réadmhaoín a dhiúscairt gan fáth muna bhfaigheadh sé ceadú na Roinne. Eisítear na socruithe ar dhiúscairt talún breise ag Seirbhís Talún agus Réadmhaoine na Roinne Airgeadais agus Pearsanra. De réir na treorach, éilítear ar an Roinn a chinntiú go mbaintear an luach is fearr amach.

The former Faughan Valley School is in the ownership of the Western Education and Library Board (WELB). Under Article 106(5) of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 the WELB cannot dispose of any land or premises gratuitously unless the approval of the Department is obtained. The arrangements for the disposal of surplus land are detailed in guidance issued by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services. In accordance with the guidance Department's are required to ensure that best value is obtained.

The WELB has advised that there is no Public Sector or educational interest in the site and the WELB therefore intends to dispose of it on the open market. I have advised CnaG that, if in the context of

their strategic vision for post-primary provision, the site of the former post-primary school is deemed appropriate for a new Meanscoil to write directly to the WELB to lodge their interest.

Bullying

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education to outline the process followed by schools in dealing with instances of bullying.

(AQW 4598/10)

Minister of Education: Cuireann an tOrdú um Oideachas agus Leabharlanna 2003, a tháinig i ngníomh ar 1 Aibreán 2003, ceanglais ar gach scoil dheontaschúnta le beartas frithbhulaíochta a bheith acu ina bpolasaí airíonachta a chuimsíonn bearta ar gach foirm de bhulaíocht i measc daltaí a chosc. Déantar monatóireacht ar éifeachtacht na mbearta seo tríd na hiniúchtaí rialta a dhéantar ar shocruithe tréadchúraim.

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003, which came into operation on 1 April 2003, places a duty on all grant-aided schools to have an anti-bullying policy within their Discipline policy which includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. The effectiveness of these measures is monitored through the regular cycle of school inspections of pastoral care arrangements.

The Department's publication 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour' offers detailed guidance, practical initiatives and case studies to support schools to tackle bullying. It also provides advice about supporting the child who has been bullied and dealing with the bully. The guidance suggests that schools should include in its anti-bullying policy an undertaking to:

- investigate thoroughly any reported or suspected instances of bullying;
- listen to, consult, and protect and support the victims at all times;
- take all necessary steps to identify those responsible, deploy appropriate sanctions, and give them help to change their behaviour; and
- report back, fully and promptly, to any parent who has raised with the school a concern about bullying.

Whilst the Department has issued this guidance to schools, it is for each school to determine, taking account of its own ethos and circumstances, in consultation with pupils and parents, the detail of their policy and hence, how they will deal with a bullying incident within the school.

My Department has funded the local Anti-bullying Forum to develop, in conjunction with the five Education and Library Boards, a resource which will assist schools in responding to alleged incidents of bullying. This resource will map out different stages in managing an alleged bullying incident, and offer a range of interventions that schools may use, which support both the young person being bullied and the young person bullying others. The Forum's website (www.niabf.org.uk) hosts a range of information and resources to support teachers in delivering strong anti-bullying messages in their schools.

In terms of other support available for victims of bullying, the Department funds Childline NI to provide a dedicated anti-bullying telephone helpline for pupils and young people.

The independent schools' counselling service is also available in all grant aided post-primary schools allowing pupils to speak to a trained counsellor about their concerns or fears around bullying.

Bullying

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of recorded instances of bullying in schools since May 2007; and (ii) what progress her Department has made in addressing bullying in schools.

(AQW 4599/10)

Minister of Education: Níl fáilte roimh bhulaíocht, in aon fhoirm ar bith agus mar gheall ar aon fháth ar bith, i scoileanna. Faoi láthair, ní éilfear ar scoileanna taghmhais bhulaíochta a thaifeadh, agus bheadh mo Roinn buartha faoi chur le hualach maorlathach atá ar scoileanna ag an am seo trí cheanglais a chur ar phríomhoidí a leithéid a dhéanamh.

Bullying, in whatever form and for whatever reason, has no place in schools.

Schools are not currently required to record incidences of bullying and my Department would be concerned about adding to the bureaucratic burden on schools at this time by requiring Principals to do so.

However, the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003, which came into operation on 1 April 2003, places a duty on all grant-aided schools to have an anti-bullying policy which includes measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. The effectiveness of these measures is monitored through the regular cycle of school inspections.

The Department recognises that it cannot solve the issue of bullying alone, and therefore continues to work in close partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations through its membership and funding of the local Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF). The Forum enables members to share models of best practice, disseminate information, to develop and coordinate joint initiatives and to ensure that schools and organisations working with children and young people are able to develop appropriate strategies to prevent and deal with bullying behaviours.

From early 2006, the Department has been funding a regional coordinator post attached to the NIABF. The coordinator is involved delivering the 3-year Anti-Bullying Strategy which includes the development, implementation and promotion of models of good practice, developing parental partnerships, website development and an annual anti-bullying week.

The Forum and the Department are also members of the British and Irish Anti-Bullying Forum through which formal links have been established with similar bodies in the South, England, Wales and Scotland.

The Education and Library Boards have established an Inter-Board Group, which is developing a common approach to tackle bullying in schools. Each Board has a designated officer who works with schools to tackle bullying through assisting in the development of whole school policies and supporting individual pupils who have been victims of bullying.

In June 2007, the Department published a research report on "The Nature and Extent of Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland". The findings show little change in the level of bullying behaviour reported by pupils compared to an earlier study completed in 2002. A research exercise will be commissioned by the Department next year with a view to a further comparative publication in 2012.

The Department continues to fund Childline NI to provide a dedicated anti-bullying telephone helpline for pupils and young people.

The independent schools' counselling service is available in all grant aided post-primary schools allowing pupils to speak to a trained counsellor about their concerns or fears around bullying.

Educational Underachievement

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education what action she has taken in relation to educational underachievement among working class Protestant pupils.

(AQW 4601/10)

Minister of Education: Maireann míbhuntáiste oideachasúil i measc Protastúnach agus Caitliceach, buachaillí agus cailíní araon. Baineann sé le míbhuntáiste socheachnamaíoch agus cuirtear easpa dóchais leis ró-mhinic.

Educational disadvantage exists among Protestants and Catholics, boys and girls, and among our ethnic minorities. Too often, it is related to socio-economic disadvantage and compounded by poverty of aspiration.

Research on the impact of selection shows that preparing children for the transfer tests distorted the curriculum and required teachers to adopt a narrow repertoire of teaching strategies, rather than fully developing literacy and numeracy through more engaging approaches. Pupils not entered for the tests received unequal or less attention than transfer test pupils and some children had classroom experiences that not only failed to meet their needs as learners but left them uninterested, demotivated and misunderstood as learners. I therefore introduced Transfer 2010 to put an end to these detrimental impacts, particularly on our most disadvantaged young people.

My focus is on tackling underachievement wherever it exists and improving outcomes for all our young people, whether they are Catholic or Protestant, boys or girls, or from our newcomer communities, the children from which have so many hurdles to overcome. I am putting in place a jigsaw of inter-connected policies aimed at ensuring every child fulfils her or his potential – Every School a Good School, Transfer 2010, the revised curriculum, the literacy and numeracy strategy, the review of SEN and Inclusion, the Achieving Belfast and Derry programmes and the establishment of ESA.

Meetings with Counterparts in the Irish Republic

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education if the proposed meeting between her officials and their counterparts in the Irish Republic has taken place, as agreed in the North South Ministerial Council meeting of 25 November 2009; and if so, to detail the outcome.

(AQW 4602/10)

Minister of Education: The meeting took place on 11 December 2009. My officials have since undertaken a survey of border schools in the North to identify the numbers of pupils crossing the border. This has identified 259 pupils travelling to the North on a daily basis to schools of both communities. I am awaiting the figures from the South of Ireland on the numbers of pupils travelling to schools in the South.

Tá sé ar intinn agam tograí a tharraint anuas os comhair an Choiste Fheidhmiúcháin chun an ainmhrialtacht seo a bhaint. I ré na gluaiseachta saoire seo san Eoraip, caithfidh muid bacainní ar shoghluaiseacht a bhaint le cinntiú go gcloítear le cearta saoránach na hEorpa.

I plan to bring forward proposals to the Executive in relation to this matter. In this day and age of free movement within the European Union, we need to remove obstacles to mobility and ensure that European citizens' rights are adhered to.

Detached Youth Provision in Belfast

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget provided for detached youth provision in Belfast for (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) 2009/10, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4617/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education provides funding to the Education and Library Boards for the provision of Youth Services in their areas. It is the responsibility of each of the Boards to decide how it distributes its budgets and resources taking account of the need to ensure that resources are allocated on an equitable basis and based on an assessment of objective need. As a result, the provision and funding of Youth Services in local areas will change over time.

Sholáthar Príomhfheidhmeannaigh de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste, de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt agus de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt an t-eolas seo a leanas ar leithdháiltí an bhuiséid i leith soláthair scortha don ógra le linn na mblianta airgeadais 2007/08 go 2009/10.

The Chief Executives of the Belfast, South Eastern and North Eastern Education and Library Boards have provided the following information on the budget allocations for detached youth provision during the financial years 2007/08 to 2009/10:

Constituency area	ELB	2007/08 (£)	2008/09 (£)	2009/10 (£)
Belfast East	BELB	83,011	114,801	135,400
	SEELB	12,500	65,000	69,000
Belfast North	BELB	113,097	153,379	203,100
	NEELB	65,358	50,667	62,004
Belfast South	BELB	163,934	145,561	101,550
	SEELB	13,000	15,300	15,500
Belfast West	BELB	195,913	292,134	236,950
	SEELB	98,000	99,000	100,000

Detached Youth Provision

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education to detail the budget provided to the Belfast Education and Library Board for detached youth provision for (i) 2007/08; (ii) 2008/09; and (iii) 2009/10, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 4618/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education provides funding to the Education and Library Boards for the provision of Youth Services in their areas. It is the responsibility of each of the Boards to decide how it distributes its budgets and resources taking account of the need to ensure that resources are allocated on an equitable basis and based on an assessment of objective need. As a result, the provision and funding of Youth Services in local areas will change over time.

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Belfast West	BELB	195,913	292,134	236,950
	SEELB	98,000	99,000	100,000

Capital Project for Schools in Holywood

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when the capital project for schools in Holywood will commence; and if this is different from the original timescale.

(AQW 4635/10)

Minister of Education: Chuir Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt Bhreithmheas Eacnamaíochta (BE) athbhreithnithe ar riachtanais chóiríochta toadhcháí Naíscóile agus Bunscoile na Coille Naofa agus Coláiste Comhtháite na Prióireachta faoi bhráid na Roinne i mí na Samhna 2009 agus tá sé á bhreathnú faoi láthair. I ndiaidh a chéile, tá obair ag dul ar aghaidh i dtaca leis an athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil a d'fhógair mé ar 15 Deireadh Fómhair 2009, lena chinntiú go bhfuil siad go léir i gcomhréir leis an chreat iomlán beartais atá curtha i bhfeidhm agam le comhionannas a chur chun cinn agus chun dul i ngleic le míbhuntáiste agus go mbeidh siad inbhuanaithe inmharthana san fhadtéarma. Cinnfear toradh an athbhreithnithe an bealach chun tosaigh.

A revised Economic Appraisal (EA) to consider the future accommodation needs of Holywood Nursery and Primary Schools and Priory Integrated College was submitted to the Department by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board in November 2009 and is currently under consideration. In tandem, work is ongoing in relation to the review of all current projects which I announced on 15 October 2009, to ensure that all are consistent with the overall policy framework which I have put in place to promote equality and tackle disadvantage and will be viable and sustainable in the long term. The outcome of that review will determine the way forward.

Capital Project for Bangor Grammar School

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the timescale for the capital project for Bangor Grammar School; and if this is different from the original timescale.

(AQW 4637/10)

Minister of Education: Nuashonraíodh an Breithmheas Eacnamaíochta agus tá sé á bhreathnú ag an Roinn faoi láthair. D'fhógair mé athbhreithniú ar gach tionscadal caipitil ar 15 Deireadh Fómhair 2009 lena chinntiú go bhfuil siad go léir i gcomhréir leis an chreat iomlán beartais atá curtha i bhfeidhm agam le comhionannas a chur chun cinn agus chun dul i ngleic le míbhuntáiste agus go mbeidh siad inbhuanaithe inmharthana san fhadtéarma. Is é tionscadal le haghaidh Ardscoil Bheannachair ceann de na tionscadail atá á mheas faoi láthair agus is féidir liom a dhearbhu go gcinnfear toradh an athbhreithnithe an bealach chun tosaigh.

The Economic Appraisal has recently been updated and is currently being considered by the Department.

On 15 October 2009 I announced a review of all current projects to ensure that all are consistent with the overall policy framework I have put in place to promote equality and tackle disadvantage and will be viable and sustainable in the long term. The project for Bangor Grammar School is one of those currently being assessed and I can advise that the outcome of the review will determine the way forward.

Capital Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail any delay in her Department's capital projects in the last year.

(AQW 4638/10)

Minister of Education: Faoi Phlean Soláthair Infheistíochta (PSI), tá mo Roinn ag forbairt 108 olltionscadal caipitil. Go dtí seo cuireadh 24 de na tionscadail seo i gcrích agus tá 16 díobh faoi bhealach faoi láthair. Tá 68 tionscadal eile ag céimeanna éagsúla den phróiseas pleanála agus faofa.

Under the Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) my Department has been taking forward 108 major capital projects. To date 24 of these projects have been completed and 16 are currently on site. The remaining 68 are at various stages of the planning and approval process. There are also other potential projects which will have to be factored into consideration given recent reviews.

The timing of construction of announced projects can be affected by a number of factors including changes over time to the long term viability of a school, planning issues and the availability of capital resources. While the majority of projects have not been taken forward within the timeframe originally envisaged, they have been taken forward when all the necessary appraisal and approval processes have been completed and where funds have been available.

It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. On 15 October, therefore I announced a review of all capital projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.

Sparklebox Website

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education (i) with whom C2K consulted in determining that the relevant safeguards were in place to allow access to the Sparklebox website to continue; (ii) why this decision was subsequently reversed; and (iii) with whom C2K consulted in reversing this decision. **(AQW 4642/10)**

Minister of Education: I have been informed by C2k that it took into consideration the advice from Becta and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) in respect of the safety of the Sparklebox website. C2k's initial view was that:

- the Sparklebox website provided a range of educational content of value to schools and contained no interactive elements that would put children at risk; and
- the C2k network has built-in automatic filtering which disabled any possible interactive component in the site.

C2k continued to monitor the position with schools and colleagues in other educational agencies and, on 1 February, the C2k Management Board decided to block the site following concerns raised by a Belfast primary school. The decision was made on the basis that, although the site carried no risk in terms of the resources it contained, there was a potential risk of causing upset to parents and children given the very serious nature of the offences committed by the former operator of Sparklebox.

D'iarr mé ar Barry Mulholland, Príomhfheidhmeannach de Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair lena iniúchadh cuimsitheach a dhéanamh ar na saincheisteanna a bhaineann le cás Sparklebox chun na fíricí lána a bhunú, agus chun moltaí a dhéanamh ar cad iad na ceachtanna is féidir a fhoghlaim uathí maidir le polasaithe agus nósanna imeachta um chosaint a fheabhsú agus a fhorbairt.

I have instructed Barry Mulholland, Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board to investigate comprehensively the issues around the Sparklebox case to establish the full facts, and to make recommendations on what lessons can be learned from it in terms of enhancing further policies and procedures for protecting the safety of children.

Sparklebox Website

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail any money spent by her Department to facilitate access to the Sparklebox website. **(AQW 4644/10)**

Minister of Education: Ní raibh aon chostais a bhaineann le teacht ar láithreán gréasáin Sparklebox.

No costs were associated with accessing the Sparklebox website.

Sparklebox Website

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education how she learned that an individual found guilty of downloading abusive images of children was running the Sparklebox website.

(AQW 4645/10)

Minister of Education: Ar 28 Eanáir 2010, cuireadh ciontú oibritheoir Sparklebox agus na buarthaí a tháinig as in iúl don Roinn Oideachais trí theagmháil le Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne Bhéal Feirste. Cuireadh in iúl dom an lá ina dhiaidh.

On 28 January 2010, the Department of Education was made aware through contact from the Belfast Education and Library Board of the conviction of the operator of Sparklebox and the concerns that this had raised. I was informed the following day.

As the member will know, I subsequently made a full statement in the Assembly and have initiated an investigation into C2k's handling of the case.

Proposed New Primary School in Islandmagee

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposed new primary school in Islandmagee, given that the project was first published by the North Eastern Education and Library Board in 2003 and the fact that a site with planning permission has been purchased.

(AQW 4646/10)

Minister of Education: Chuaigh an Rollú Fad-Téarma don bhunscoil beartaithe nua in Oileán Mhic Aodha i laghad go leibhéal atá go suntasach faoi íosthairseach rollaithe de 105 le haghaidh bunscoile tuaithe inbhuanaithe mar a bhí leagtha amach i mbeartas na Roinne i leith Scoileanna Inbhuanaithe. Mar gheall ar na buarthaí seo maidir le hinbhuanaitheacht, d'iarr m'fheidhmeannaigh ar Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt soláthar a mheas sa cheantar níos leithne agus forbhreathnú straitéiseach a sholáthar don Roinn.

The Long-Term Enrolment for the proposed new primary school in Islandmagee has declined to a level substantially below the minimum enrolment threshold of 105 outlined in the Department's Sustainable School's Policy for a sustainable rural primary school. Given these concerns regarding sustainability, my officials have asked the North Eastern Education and Library Board to consider provision in the wider area and provide the Department with a strategic overview.

Definition of Schools

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to provide a definition of a (i) voluntary school; (ii) maintained school; and (iii) controlled school.

(AQW 4707/10)

Minister of Education: The legal definitions, as contained in Article 2 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 as amended, are as follows:

- (i) 'voluntary school' means a grant-aided school other than a controlled school or grant-maintained integrated school;
- (ii) 'maintained school' means a voluntary school other than a grammar school or a school which has, under Part II of Schedule 5, ceased to be a maintained school;
- (iii) 'controlled school' means a grant-aided school under the management of a (education & library) board.

Is í an phríomhdhifríocht idir scoileanna deonacha agus scoileanna rialaithe ná go bhfuil scoileanna deonacha (agus scoileanna comhtháite atá faoi chothabháil stáit) faoi uinéireacht phríobháideach agus tá scoileanna rialaithe faoi uinéireacht phoiblí.

The main difference between voluntary and controlled schools is that voluntary schools (and grant maintained integrated schools) are held in private ownership whereas controlled schools are in public ownership.

Governance Status of New Schools

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail how the management or governance status of any new school is determined.

(AQW 4708/10)

Minister of Education: Éilíonn bunú scoile deontas-chúnta nua foilsíú Thogra Forbartha reachtaigh. Chuirfeadh tionscnóirí na scoile molta nua tús leis an phróiseas seo agus tá sé ar na tionscnóirí an cineál scoile a bheartú, ag cur na bhforálacha sna hOrduithe um Oideachas agus Leabharlanna san áireamh.

The establishment of a new grant-aided school requires the publication of a statutory Development Proposal. This process would be initiated by the sponsors of the proposed new school and it is for the sponsors to determine the type of school with due regard to the provisions in the Education and Libraries (NI) Orders.

Transport to Schools Funding

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education if she can confirm that the allocation of funding for transport to (i) secondary schools; and (ii) grammar schools will not be reduced in the coming year.

(AQW 4724/10)

Minister of Education: Tá mé ag meas roghanna ar na coigiltí breise atá riachtanach ón bhuiséad oideachais a dhéanamh faoi láthair. Is substaintiúil atá scála na gcoigiltí le déanamh agus beidh sé deacair iad a sholáthar ar bhealach a n-íoslaghdóidh an tionchar a bheidh acu ar sheirbhísí túslíne. Maidir leis an chomhionannas, déanfaidh m'fheidhmeannaigh measúnú comhionannais ar gach ceann de na tograí agus ní dhéanfar aon chinneadh go dtí go gcríochnófar an próiseas seo.

I am currently considering options for delivering the additional savings required from the education budget. The scale of the additional savings to be found is substantial and presents a significant challenge to deliver in a way that minimises as far as possible, the impact on front line services. In terms of equality my officials will carry out an equality assessment on each of the proposals and no decisions will be made until this process has been completed.

Capital Building Projects

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education to list the capital building projects which have been completed, those currently underway and those which are at the planning stage since May 2007.

(AQW 4831/10)

Minister of Education: Tá 39 mórthionscadal caipitiúil scoile curtha i gcrích ó mhí Bealtaine 2007, ar infheistíocht de bhreis agus £253m san eastát scoile é. Is iad na tionscadail a críochnaíodh ó mhí Bealtaine 2007 ná:-

Since May 2007, 39 major capital school projects have been completed representing an investment of over £253m in our schools estate. The projects completed since May 2007 are:

School Name	Capital Cost £M
Abbey G.S. Newry	16.2
Ashfield Girls H.S. Belfast	23.4
Ballinderry P.S.	2.6
Ballyholme P.S. Bangor	3.8
Ballymacrickett P.S. Crumlin	2.9
Ballymena Maintained Primary Schools	5.0
Bangor Academy	23.8
Brookefield Special School, Moira	5.2
Camphill P.S. Ballymena	2.9
Cedar Lodge Special School, Belfast	4.7
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	11.1
Drumrane P.S. Dungiven	1.0
Enniskillen Integrated P.S.	2.4
Fivemiletown H.S.	9.6
Fourtowns P.S. Ahoghill	2.2
Glendhu Nursery School, Belfast	0.6
Holy Cross College, Strabane	31.3
Killen P.S. Castlederg	1.1
Kircubbin Nursery School	0.3
La Salle Boys School, Belfast	13.5
Lisneal College, Derry	14.2
Maralin P.S. Craigavon	2.2
Moorfields P.S. Ballymena	2.1
Mossley P.S. Newtownabbey	4.2
Mount Lourdes G.S. Enniskillen	4.0
Nendrum College, Comber	10.9
Orangefield P.S. Belfast	7.0
Pond Park P.S. Lisburn	4.9
Ravenscroft Nursery School, Belfast	0.9
Saintfield H.S.	3.4
St Catherine's College, Armagh	0.5
St Colman's College, Newry	11.1
St Patrick's College, Dungannon	9.7

School Name	Capital Cost £M
St Patrick's PS. Saul	1.5
St Peter's PS. Cloughreagh	3.2
Templepatrick PS.	3.9
Towerview PS. Bangor	3.6
Victoria PS. Ballyhalbert	1.5
Waringstown PS.	1.4

A further 16 major capital school projects are currently on site representing a further investment of over £252m. These are as follows:

School Name	Capital Cost £M
Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	13.7
Banbridge Academy	17.9
Belfast Model School For Boys	32.7
Belfast Model School For Girls	30.9
Grosvenor G.S.	27.8
Lisbellaw PS.	2.3
Lisnagelvin PS. Derry	5.5
Magherafelt H.S.	10.5
Our Lady & St Patrick's College Knock	23.0
St Cecilia's College, Derry	19.8
St Dominic's H.S. Belfast	18.5
St Joseph's PS. Carryduff	5.8
St Mary's College Derry	19.8
St Mary's PS. Portglenone	3.9
St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	16.8
St Patrick's & St Brigid's PS. Ballycastle	3.9

In addition, the following 69 major capital school projects are currently at various stages on the planning process:

School Name	Project Details
Artigarvan PS. Strabane	New school on existing site
Arvalee / Cranny Special School Omagh	New school on existing site
Ballykelly PS. Limavady	New school on existing site
Ballymoney HS	New school on existing site
Bangor G.S.	New school on new site
Belmont Special School Derry	New school on existing site
Carrick PS. Warrenpoint	New school on existing extended site

School Name	Project Details
Coláiste Feirste, Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
Coranny & Cornagague P.S. Roslea	New school on new site
Dean Maguirc College Carrickmore	New school on new site
Devenish College Enniskillen	New school on new site
Dromintee P.S. Killeavey	New school on existing extended site
Dromore Central P.S.	New school on new site
Ebrington P.S. Derry	New school on existing site
Edenderry N.S./Glenwood P.S. Belfast	New school on new site
Edendork P.S. Dungannon	New school on new site
Eglinton P.S. Derry	New school on existing site
Enniskillen Model P.S.	New school on existing site
Foyle & Londonderry College	New school on new site
Glastry College Ballyhalbert	New school on existing extended site
Greenwood Assessment Centre Belfast	New school on existing site
Holy Family P.S. Magherafelt	New school on existing extended site
Holy Trinity College Cookstown	New school on existing site
Hollywood P.S.	New school on new site
Knockbreda H.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
Knockevin Special School Downpatrick	New school on existing site
Lagan College Belfast (PPP)	Extension & Refurbishment
Limegrove / Glasvey Special School Limavady	New school on existing site
Little Flower Girls S.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
Loreto Grammar Omagh	New school on existing site
Lurgan College	New school on existing site
Magherafelt P.S.	New school on new site
Methodist College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
Mitchell House Special School Belfast	New school on existing site
New Buildings P.S. – Derry	New school on existing site
Omagh I.P.S.	New school on new site
Parkhall College Antrim	New school on existing site
Portadown College	New school on existing site
Priory College Holywood	New school on new site
Rainey Endowed School Magherafelt	New school on existing site
Scoil Na Fuisseoige Belfast	New school on existing site

School Name	Project Details
Springhill P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
St Bronagh's P.S. Rostrevor	New school on existing site
St Clare's Abbey P.S. Newry	New school on new site
St Colman's P.S. Lambeg	New school on existing site
St Columba's P.S. Straw	New school on new site
St Columbanus College Bangor	New school on existing site
St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore	New school on existing site
St Conor's P.S. Omagh	New school on existing site
St Joseph's Convent P.S. Newry	New school on existing site
St Joseph's P.S. Madden	New school on existing site
St Louis G.S. Kilkeel	New school on existing site
St Mary's PS Banbridge.	New school on existing site
St Mary's P.S. Newcastle	New school on existing site
St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill	New school on new site
St Patrick's Academy Dungannon	New school on existing site
St Patrick's College Banbridge	New school on existing site
St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Extension & Refurbishment
St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	New school on existing site
St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan	New school on existing extended site
Strand / Sydenham P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
Strandtown P.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
Strathearn G.S. Belfast	New school on existing site
Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan	New school on existing site
Taughmonagh PS Belfast	New school on existing site
The High School Ballynahinch	New school on existing site
Tor Bank Special Belfast (PPP)	New school on existing site
Victoria College Belfast	Extension & Refurbishment
Whitehouse PS Newtownabbey	New school on existing site

It is necessary to ensure that investment in the education estate is consistent with and supportive of the policy framework I am putting in place. On 15 October 2009, therefore I announced a review of all capital projects to validate that all are consistent with the policy framework and hence will be viable and sustainable in the long term.

This review will ensure that available resources are used to secure the best outcomes for children and maximum value for the taxpayer.

Department for Employment and Learning

People Aged 60 and Above Currently in a Further Education Course

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people aged 60 and above are currently registered in a Further Education course; and for the equivalent figure in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4393/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The table below details the number of enrolments aged 60 and above registered in a Further Education course in 2008/09 and in each of the previous five years.

Academic year	Professional/Technical Enrolments	Non Professional/ Technical Enrolments	Total
2003/04	5,427	21,288	26,715
2004/05	6,563	21,741	28,304
2005/06	6,300	20,704	27,004
2006/07	6,366	17,049	23,415
2007/08	5,327	11,515	16,842
2008/09	4,942	9,537	14,479

Source: Further Education Statistical Record.

Note: Non Professional/Technical enrolments relate to hobby and leisure courses, which are non-accredited.

Preventative and Early Intervention Measures

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the percentage of his annual budget which is directed towards preventative and early intervention measures.

(AQW 4422/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The answer to this question is very much dependant on the definition of "preventative and early intervention measures". The Department's annual budget for 2009/10 is broken down as follows:

- Employment and Skills(including Further Education) - £355m;
- Higher Education - £244m;
- Student Support - £175m;
- Corporate Services and Employment Rights and European Social Fund - £42m;

Of these, I would suggest that, Employment and Skills (including Further Education) and Higher Education are deemed as preventative and early intervention measures, as the activities of these programmes are either designed to address barriers to employment or , through learning and skills acquisition, to improve peoples life chances for the future thereby contributing to economic development This equates to 73.4% of my total budget.

Number of Students in Further and Higher Education

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) full-time students; and (ii) part-time students attended each Further and Higher Education college, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4498/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The tables below detail the number of Full time and Part time Enrolments at each of the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges from 2004/05 to 2008/09.

(I) FULL TIME PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	8,145	9,189	7,953	6,548	6,025
Northern Regional College	5,112	4,633	4,879	4,694	4,554
South Eastern Regional College	5,053	5,198	5,020	4,854	4,215
Southern Regional College	5,107	5,086	5,089	5,185	4,783
South West College	3,438	3,876	3,863	3,763	3,418
North West Regional College	4,174	5,162	4,862	4,169	4,279
Total	31,029	33,144	31,666	29,213	27,274

(II) PART TIME PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	27,733	32,129	36,289	31,498	31,569
Northern Regional College	15,605	17,240	18,589	16,395	15,268
South Eastern Regional College	18,428	16,483	19,254	16,906	19,250
Southern Regional College	21,888	20,273	20,424	22,024	22,526
South West College	16,221	13,831	12,624	13,241	13,730
North West Regional College	17,420	15,089	12,440	12,823	12,869
Total	117,295	115,045	119,620	112,887	115,212

(II) NON PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS (ALL-PART TIME)

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	16,413	18,799	16,098	11,050	12,559
Northern Regional College	12,088	10,579	8,681	6,324	3,769
South Eastern Regional College	7,654	6,450	5,016	4,252	3,241
Southern Regional College	15,353	14,612	9,704	5,903	5,235
South West College	16,837	16,598	9,640	6,033	5,278
North West Regional College	6,343	6,888	6,318	4,450	4,214
Total	74,688	73,926	55,457	38,012	34,296

Source: Further Education Statistical Record.

Note: Non Professional/Technical enrolments relate to hobby and leisure courses, which are non-accredited.

Essential Skills Courses

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students undertook Essential Skills courses in (i) literacy; (ii) numeracy; and (iii) I.T skills in each Further and Higher Education college, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4499/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of students who undertook an Essential Skills course in (i) literacy; (ii) numeracy; and (iii) ICT, in each of the Further and Higher Education colleges, in each of the last five years, is detailed in the tables below. ICT was introduced as an Essential Skills course in 2009/10. Previously it had been piloted in the three previous academic years in a limited number of training providers.

I) LITERACY

Academic Year ¹	Regional College					
	Belfast Metropolitan College	Northern Regional College	North West Regional College	South Eastern Regional College	Southern Regional College	South West Regional College
2004/05	546	794	497	401	603	527
2005/06	760	891	579	929	1,027	485
2006/072	824	740	655	855	825	588
2007/08	959	977	814	815	966	670
2008/09	1,222	1,425	1,107	1,547	1,408	998

Source: Essential Skills Enrolment Return.

II) NUMERACY

Academic Year ¹	Regional College					
	Belfast Metropolitan College	Northern Regional College	North West Regional College	South Eastern Regional College	Southern Regional College	South West Regional College
2004/05	277	456	285	157	298	307
2005/06	682	799	483	772	580	352
2006/072	803	714	553	994	634	584
2007/08	1,018	1,071	696	994	950	744
2008/09	1,306	1,477	1,027	1,537	1,184	1,067

Source: Essential Skills Enrolment Return.

III) INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Academic Year1	Regional College					
	Belfast Metropolitan College	Northern Regional College	North West Regional College	South Eastern Regional College	Southern Regional College	South West Regional College
2006/072	15	56	35	29	25	32
2007/08	103	28	29	70	70	54
2008/09	290	121	101	300	20	0

Source: Essential Skills Enrolment Return.

Notes:

Figures are correct as at 5th March 2009.

- 1 Academic year is defined as 1st August to 31st July.
- 2 Please note the previous 16 Further and Higher Education Colleges merged together into six Regional Colleges in 2006/07.

Number of Enrolments in Further and Higher Education

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the growth in the number of (i) level 2 enrolments; and (ii) level 3 enrolments in each Further and Higher Education college, in the last ten years.

(AQW 4502/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The table below details the number of enrolments on Level 2 and Level 3 courses in each Further and Higher Education college in 1999/00 and 2008/09.

College	Level 2		Level 3	
	1999/00	2008/09	1999/00	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	9,211	8,639	7,663	10,999
Northern Regional College	4,697	8,071	5,940	5,603
South Eastern Regional College	5,791	9,850	4,391	5,609
Southern Regional College	4,101	13,899	5,495	7,246
South West College	3,674	6,905	3,620	4,225
North West Regional College	5,876	4,778	5,452	4,392
Total	33,350	52,142	32,561	38,074

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

Number of Students in Further and Higher Education

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) full-time; and (ii) part-time students who studied higher education courses in each Further and Higher Education college, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4504/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The tables below detail the number of Full time and Part time Enrolments who studied Higher Education courses at each of the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges from 2004/05 to 2008/09.

(I) FULL TIME ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	1,703	1,761	1,734	1,613	1,576
Northern Regional College	163	210	276	223	213
South Eastern Regional College	556	573	572	603	553
Southern Regional College	377	401	453	503	488
South West College	143	124	109	169	230
North West Regional College	563	921	772	764	788
Total	3,505	3,990	3,916	3,875	3,848

(II) PART TIME ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	2,998	3,483	3,111	2,554	2,474
Northern Regional College	1,043	1,072	907	814	787
South Eastern Regional College	1,087	979	734	654	635
Southern Regional College	1,389	1,228	1,402	1,198	1,184
South West College	1,018	1,068	830	623	825
North West Regional College	958	972	725	525	528
Total	8,493	8,802	7,709	6,368	6,433

Source: Further Education Statistical Record.

Number of Students in Further and Higher Education

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students aged (i) 14-16; and (ii) 17-19 in each Further and Higher Education college, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4505/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The tables below detail the number of enrolments aged 14-16 and 17-19 in each Northern Ireland Further Education college in each of the last five years.

(I) 14-16 PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	3,737	4,294	5,299	5,250	5,055
Northern Regional College	4,874	5,358	6,048	6,164	6,343
South Eastern Regional College	3,628	3,648	5,347	5,445	5,787
Southern Regional College	7,253	7,155	6,683	8,579	8,854

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
South West College	3,012	3,505	3,781	4,312	4,624
North West Regional College	3,989	3,226	2,963	3,510	3,321
Total	26,493	27,186	30,121	33,260	33,984

14-16 Non Professional/Technical Enrolments

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	308	629	324	56	186
Northern Regional College	359	186	121	169	177
South Eastern Regional College	718	958	135	439	177
Southern Regional College	973	748	338	614	454
South West College	740	478	233	157	78
North West Regional College	312	317	131	102	177
Total	3,410	3,316	1,282	1,537	1,249

(II) 17-19 PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	8,254	10,355	10,450	9,225	9,683
Northern Regional College	5,340	5,714	5,994	5,896	5,428
South Eastern Regional College	5,400	5,454	6,226	6,110	6,449
Southern Regional College	6,117	6,172	6,063	6,337	6,461
South West College	4,057	4,163	4,298	4,729	4,913
North West Regional College	5,136	4,835	4,310	3,731	4,076
Total	34,304	36,693	37,341	36,028	37,010

17-19 NON PROFESSIONAL/TECHNICAL ENROLMENTS

College	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Belfast Metropolitan College	398	1,045	935	193	492
Northern Regional College	545	333	281	235	177
South Eastern Regional College	311	260	195	414	399
Southern Regional College	731	781	551	520	536
South West College	694	621	468	245	215
North West Regional College	306	352	186	148	212
Total	2,985	3,392	2,616	1,755	2,031

Note: Non Professional/Technical enrolments relate to hobby and leisure courses, which are non-accredited

Unemployment in the Kilcooley Estate

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is his Department doing to reduce unemployment in the Kilcooley Estate in Bangor.

(AQW 4549/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A comprehensive range of services is available through Bangor JobCentre and through contracted providers to help the unemployed including those in Kilcooley find work. These services include 'Steps to Work,' a flexible, menu-based, modular approach to provision, better tailored to the individual's needs, with a clear emphasis on increasing the participants' employability prospects. The Pathways to Work programme is open to clients with health conditions or disabilities and there is a range of provision available through the Department's Disablement Advisory Service to help people with specific disabilities. In addition, Progress2Work (NI) is specifically targeted at ex-prisoners, those who are homeless and those with substance misuse/abuse issues will run until March 2010. The Department's Careers Service provides an all age Careers Information, Advice and Guidance service to adults and young people. These services can be accessed through our specially trained Personal Adviser Service based in the local Jobcentre at 65 High Street Bangor BT20 5BE.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

New Start-up Businesses

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of new start-up businesses which began trading with Invest NI support in each of the last five years; (ii) the number of these businesses which (a) continue to trade; and (b) ceased trading; and (iv) the number of these businesses which ceased trading after (a) one year; (b) two years; (c) three years; (d) four years; and (e) five years.

(AQW 4415/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): During the period 2004/05 to 2008/09, 397 new locally-owned businesses began trading with assistance offered directly by Invest NI. Table 1 shows (i) the number of business offered assistance in each of these five years, (ii) a. the number that continue to trade and (ii) b. the number that have ceased trading after (iii) (a) one year; (b) two years; (c) three years; (d) four years; and (e) five years.

Table 1. Businesses which began trading with Invest NI support & associated survival rates (2004/05 - 2008/09)

Year Of Offer	Number of Businesses	Number Of Businesses Ceased Trading					Total
		After 1 Year	After 2 Year	After 3 Year	After 4 Year	After 5 Year	
2004/05	57	3	4		3	1	11
2005/06	31	1		1	1		3
2006/07	69	5	1	1	1		8
2007/08	117	2	4	4			10
2008/09	123	1	5		2		8
Total	397	12	14	6	7	1	40

In addition, during the same period Invest NI also indirectly offered support to some 15,844 new business starts through the Enterprise Development Programme (formerly the Start a Business programme), delivered in conjunction with Enterprise Northern Ireland. An independent evaluation of the programme found that 87% of these new businesses were still trading after a 4 year period, which

equates to approximately 13,800 businesses. This information compares favourably with an average UK 3 year survival rate for VAT registered business of 70%.

Economically Inactive People

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of economically inactive people in each council area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4589/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of economic inactivity at district council level are sourced to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) local area database and the latest figures currently available relate to 2008. The table below contains estimates of the number of economically inactive people aged 16 and over in each district council area between 2006 and 2008.

ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE¹ (AGED 16+) BY DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA, 2006-2008

District Council Area	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	13,000	16,000	12,000
Ards	25,000	25,000	27,000
Armagh	14,000	16,000	19,000
Ballymena	18,000	19,000	18,000
Ballymoney	8,000	11,000	9,000
Banbridge	15,000	15,000	12,000
Belfast	95,000	96,000	91,000
Carrickfergus	10,000	11,000	14,000
Castlereagh	17,000	17,000	19,000
Coleraine	18,000	16,000	19,000
Cookstown	11,000	9,000	14,000
Craigavon	26,000	24,000	25,000
Derry	33,000	34,000	40,000
Down	20,000	20,000	17,000
Dungannon	17,000	14,000	16,000
Fermanagh	22,000	20,000	21,000
Larne	9,000	11,000	12,000
Limavady	12,000	12,000	14,000
Lisburn	34,000	27,000	31,000
Magherafelt	11,000	11,000	10,000
Moyle	6,000	6,000	5,000
Newry and Mourne	26,000	26,000	28,000
Newtownabbey	22,000	22,000	26,000
North Down	28,000	25,000	24,000

District Council Area	2006	2007	2008
Omagh	14,000	16,000	18,000
Strabane	14,000	15,000	12,000
Northern Ireland	539,000	536,000	553,000

- 1 The economically inactive are those people who are neither in employment nor unemployed. This group includes, for example, all those who are looking after the family/home, retired, sick/disabled or in full-time education etc.

The LFS is a sample survey and estimates from it have an associated degree of sampling error. In particular, estimates at district council level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. The vast majority of the year on year changes shown in the table are not statistically significant. Any conclusion drawn from these estimates should therefore be treated with caution.

Orange Museums

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the potential tourism opportunity of the proposed Orange museums planned in Belfast and Loughgall. **(AQW 4616/10)**

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) research highlights that visiting museums is a key activity enjoyed by tourists to Northern Ireland. The new Ulster Museum has recorded excellent visitor numbers within the first few months of opening with 100,000 in the first month alone.

NITB cannot accurately assess the tourism potential of the proposed Orange museums but know that visitors are curious to know more about our heritage. Providing the collections have real historical interest and are presented in a professional and balanced way they ought to be able to attract visitors.

However, to be successful in tourism terms it is not just the historical content that is important. Equal emphasis needs to be placed on the visitor experience, in particular:

- opening times appropriate for visitors;
- new technology and innovative interpretation;
- good access in terms of transport;
- visitor facilities such as café and shop; and specific to this project,
- links with other historical sites as promoted in the Williamite Trail.

Invest NI

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if Invest NI has a strategic policy for renewable energy. **(AQW 4621/10)**

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I issued last year a consultation paper to assist me in developing a revised strategic energy policy and, in that document, I stated that my vision was for a more sustainable energy system. I also proposed a new strategic goal to increase the amount of electricity from renewable sources to 40% by 2010. I am currently reviewing responses to the consultation and intend to issue a revised Strategic Energy Framework before the summer.

Invest NI continues to identify business opportunities in the renewable energy sector and build awareness of these within local industry.

Offshore Renewable Energy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many inquiries there have been from renewable energy companies regarding plans for their roles in offshore renewable energy.
(AQW 4713/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the preparation of the Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2009-2020 and the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), which are currently the subject of a public consultation, DETI received 12 inquiries from organisations interested in developing the potentially significant offshore wind and tidal resources in Northern Ireland waters. In all cases, DETI noted that the completion of the SEA and finalisation of the Plan would enable DETI to work with The Crown Estate, as owner of the seabed, to launch a competitive call for offshore renewable energy projects. This call is planned for 2010-2011 and will enable developers to come forward with their specific proposals.

Offshore Renewable Energy Forum

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the membership of the Offshore Renewable Energy Forum and whether it will include any representatives of the fishing industry.
(AQW 4714/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The establishment of an Offshore Renewable Energy Forum is a recommendation from the Strategic Environmental Assessment of DETI's draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2009-2020. The Forum has not yet been established. It is essential that we work with others operating within the marine environment as we take forward the Action Plan. The public consultation on the draft Plan ends on 8 March and I look forward to comments from other marine users, including the fishing industry, on both the Plan and also in relation to the membership of the Forum.

Offshore Renewable Energy Certificate

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the criteria applied in relation to the Offshore Renewable Energy Certificate.
(AQW 4715/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The main support mechanism for the production of renewable electricity is the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) which operates in tandem with similar mechanisms across the UK. It places an obligation on electricity suppliers to account for a specified and increasing proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. Evidence is by way of Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) which are issued to the generators of renewable electricity and have a monetary value and are traded on a UK wide basis.

While DETI currently has the legislative power to issue onshore ROCs, the powers to issue offshore ROCs currently lie with the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC). Within my Department's draft Offshore Renewable Energy Strategic Action Plan 2009-2020, which is the subject of a public consultation until 8 March 2010, we have set out that we will be seeking, within the overall devolved settlement, to transfer these powers from DECC to DETI.

Broadband for Rural Areas

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what plans her Department has, including a timescale, for the provision of Broadband for rural areas in Mid-Tyrone.
(AQW 4717/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Broadband has been available across all of Northern Ireland, including Mid-Tyrone, from December 2005 when work was completed under my Department's

2004 contract with BT for the delivery of 100% access in Northern Ireland to a service of not less than 512Kbps. Services are delivered through fixed wire line and satellite technologies.

More recently I announced completion of one of the fixed wireless projects supported under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund. The company delivering the project, North West Electronics, is already offering services across Mid-Tyrone and the West generally, providing further choice for residential and business customers seeking a broadband solution. These services range from a 2Mbps service to a state of the art 100Mbps business service.

On 3 December 2009 I also announced the £48m Next Generation Broadband project which will deliver Next Generation Services to 85% of businesses across Northern Ireland by 2011. The exchange areas that will benefit from this investment have been listed in response to AQW 3331/10 published in the weekly answer book dated 18 December 2009. More detailed information on the rollout programme will be available on the website www.fasterbroadbandni.com which is planned to be available from end-February 2010.

Unemployed People with Disabilities

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what percentage of people with disabilities are unemployed and how this compares to the rest of the population.

(AQO 813/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Labour Force Survey estimates for the economic status of working age persons in Northern Ireland with and without a disability are shown in the table below.

Economic status of working age¹ persons with / without a disability², Quarter 3 2009

Economic Status	Persons with disabilities	Persons without disabilities
In employment	31%	75%
Unemployed ³	5%	5%
Economically Inactive ⁴	64%	19%
All Persons ⁵	100%	100%

- 1 Working Age refers to females aged 16-59 and males aged 16 to 64.
- 2 Figures relate to current long-term disabilities that are covered by the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act and/or work-limiting disabilities.
- 3 These figures are not the same as the unemployment rates for persons with and without a disability, which are 14.0% and 6.7% respectively. The unemployment rate is the percentage of the economically active (i.e. the employed plus the unemployed) who are unemployed.
- 4 The economically inactive are those people who are neither in employment nor unemployed. This group includes, for example, all those who are looking after the family/home, retired, sick/disabled or in full-time education etc.
- 5 Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Source: NI Labour Force Survey, Quarter 3 2009

Department of the Environment

EU Nitrates Directive

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment whether the poultry industry is failing to comply with the environmental legislation, set out in the EU Nitrates Directive on 31 December 2008; and if so, what enforcement action his Department has taken.

(AQW 4360/10)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): The introduction of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (NAP Regulations) on 1 January 2007 met Northern Ireland's obligations under the Nitrates Directive.

The NAP Regulations allow the application of poultry litter to land, as a fertiliser, within the 170 kg nitrogen/hectare/year livestock manure limit. However, land spreading of this material at this level is not sustainable in the long term due to its high phosphorus content, the enriched phosphorus status of local soils and the resultant impact of excess phosphorus on water quality.

It therefore became evident during the development of the NAP Regulations that off-farm solutions as an alternative to land spreading needed to be advanced in the longer term. A proposal, by the poultry sector, to progress a technical alternative to land spreading, helped persuade the European Commission to allow a temporary measure in the NAP Regulations for the storage of poultry litter in field heaps until 31 December 2008.

As progress was not made with an off-farm solution for poultry litter on the timescale originally envisaged, agreement was sought and secured from the European Commission to extend the temporary storage measure in the Regulations up to 31 December 2010.

In 2010, the Action Programme, including the measures for storage and application of poultry litter, must be reviewed and a revised Action Programme put in place for the period 2011-2014. DOE and DARD officials are currently actively engaged with the European Commission in this review. In parallel, DOE and DARD are meeting with local stakeholders. A formal consultation will be carried during 2010 on any proposed revisions to the NAP Regulations.

In the absence of evidence of progress to implement an alternative to land spreading of poultry litter, the Commission may seek further measures to control phosphorus. The Departments will be continuing to engage with poultry industry representatives during the review process to identify options for the disposal of poultry litter from 1 January 2011.

Individual farmers are responsible for compliance with the NAP Regulations, of which storage is only one element. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is the responsible body for inspection and enforcement. In all cases of non-compliance appropriate action is taken in accordance with the NIEA Enforcement Policy. Non-compliance is also reported to DARD, under Cross Compliance, which may result in penalties against farmers' direct aid payments.

EU Nitrates Directive

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment whether EU Commissioners are aware that the Northern Ireland poultry industry is failing to comply with the EU Nitrates Directive; and if so, when he expects infraction proceedings for breach of environmental legislation to begin.

(AQW 4361/10)

Minister of the Environment: The introduction of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (NAP Regulations) on 1 January 2007 met Northern Ireland's obligations under the Nitrates Directive.

The NAP Regulations allow the application of poultry litter to land, as a fertiliser, within the 170 kg nitrogen/hectare/year livestock manure limit. However, land spreading of this material at this level is

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EU Nitrates Directive

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's strategy, from January 2010 to January 2013, to ensure the Poultry Industry's compliance with the environmental legislative requirements of the EU Nitrates Directive.

(AQW 4363/10)

Minister of the Environment: The introduction of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (NAP Regulations) on 1 January 2007 met Northern Ireland's obligations under the Nitrates Directive.

The NAP Regulations allow the application of poultry litter to land, as a fertiliser, within the 170 kg nitrogen/hectare/year livestock manure limit. However, land spreading of this material at this level is not sustainable in the long term due to its high phosphorus content, the enriched phosphorus status of local soils and the resultant impact of excess phosphorus on water quality.

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Walled City Signature Project

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of the Environment if the proposed meeting has taken place between his Department and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to discuss the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Walled City signature project, and if so, what was the outcome.
(AQW 4398/10)

Minister of the Environment: I can advise that meetings to discuss options for two schemes which form part of the Walled City Signature Project took place on 26 January 2010. I can also clarify that the Signature Project is an initiative of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) rather than the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

My officials are continuing to seek a resolution to overcome the issues raised from this meeting.

Derelict Buildings in Towns and Villages

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's remit or powers, including building control within local government, to enforce the safety and appearance of derelict buildings in towns and villages; and to provide examples of enforcement undertaken by his Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4420/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not have any powers to enforce the safety and appearance of derelict buildings and, consequently, has taken no such action. District councils have powers under Articles 65 and 66 of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 to deal with defective premises that are in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance, and to deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and neglected sites that are seriously detrimental to the amenities of a neighbourhood. However, my Department does not hold information on the extent to which these powers have been exercised by district councils in each of the last five years.

The Department of Finance and Personnel, which has policy responsibility for the building control functions of district councils, has advised that building control legislation does not provide powers in relation to dangerous or derelict buildings and, therefore, no enforcement procedures are available.

My colleague, Margaret Ritchie, MLA, the Minister for Social Development, has advised that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has powers under Article 63 of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 which give it the authority to secure or demolish premises in order to either prevent damage or to protect housing accommodation and to recover costs from the owner, where appropriate.

In addition my colleague, Conor Murphy, MP, MLA, the Minister for Regional Development, has advised that as the majority of buildings are located adjacent to public roads, it is the responsibility of property owners, or occupiers of those lands, to ensure that such buildings do not endanger or obstruct road users.

Buildings that may endanger or obstruct road users are usually identified by Roads Service during routine maintenance inspections. Although members of the general public, or public representatives, would also, from time to time, report suspect buildings to a local Roads Service Section Office. In most cases, these reports are forwarded to the local council's Building Control office, for attention.

Roads Service may also, in some cases, try to identify the owners/occupiers of the building, and seek their co-operation in removing the danger, which may include the erection of temporary signing and fencing. Should this course of action fail, Roads Service has powers, under Article 51 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, to serve notice on the owner/occupier, requiring him to carry out such works so as to remove the hazard, if in their opinion they consider the building, wall or other structure is in such a condition that it could present a danger to road users.

Where an owner/occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, or cannot be identified, Roads Service may carry out the necessary remedial works to ensure the safety of road users and will seek to recover the costs, where possible.

Claims Made Against Local Councils for Damage to Vehicles

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many claims were made against local councils for damage to vehicles in each of the last five years, broken down by council area; and (ii) to provide a summary of the reasons for the claims.

(AQW 4475/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of claims made against local councils for damage to vehicles in each of the last five financial years is provided in the table below. The main reasons for the claims may be categorised as driver error or "alleged" negligence by council employees.

AQW 4475-10 NUMBER OF CLAIMS MADE BY COUNCIL AREA, FOR DAMAGE TO VEHICLES OVER LAST 5 FINANCIAL YEARS.

Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Antrim	3	7	5	3	3
Ards*	28	21	40	44	6
Armagh	3	3	1	1	1
Ballymena	3	32	21	24	16
Ballymoney	0	2	1	3	3
Banbridge	5	7	6	3	7
Belfast	167	105	84	61	64
Carrickfergus	4	6	3	8	6
Castlereagh	3	10	17	21	10
Coleraine	4	4	6	3	5
Cookstown	2	4	1	1	1
Craigavon	16	7	20	17	19
Derry	29	32	27	22	26
Down	0	4	5	5	15
Dungannon & S Tyrone*	3	7	10	7	14
Fermanagh	0	6	4	3	5

Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Larne	1	8	5	4	0
Limavady	1	3	2	3	1
Lisburn*	7	7	6	11	6
Magherafelt	2	2	4	4	5
Moyle	2	0	5	1	1
Newry & Mourne	21	26	23	29	31
Newtownabbey	11	3	10	15	15
North Down	10	10	17	8	8
Omagh	3	5	10	0	3
Strabane	5	1	3	0	1
Total	333	322	336	301	272

* Calendar years

Claims Made Against Local Councils for Personal Injuries

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many claims were made against local councils for personal injuries in each of the last five years, broken down by council area; and (ii) to provide a summary of the reasons for the claims.

(AQW 4477/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of claims made against councils for personal injuries in each of the last five financial years is detailed in the table below. The vast majority of claims resulted from various types of falls, slips or trips on council property.

AQW4477-10 NUMBER OF PERSONAL CLAIMS MADE AGAINST COUNCILS OVER LAST FIVE FINANCIAL YEARS.

Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Antrim*	4	5	10	8	8
Ards	18	20	24	22	14
Armagh	8	16	10	7	6
Ballymena	3	7	5	11	10
Ballymoney	0	2	1	3	4
Banbridge	1	4	5	3	2
Belfast	243	217	213	150	178
Carrickfergus*	12	17	23	10	12
Castlereagh*	3	14	21	15	18
Coleraine	8	7	8	6	6
Cookstown	5	6	6	6	4
Craigavon*	45	34	24	31	23

Council	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Derry	35	32	26	23	22
Down	1	11	17	29	30
Dungannon & S Tyrone	3	7	10	7	13
Fermanagh	3	5	12	4	11
Larne	13	10	5	4	5
Limavady	3	6	3	3	1
Lisburn	20	14	15	14	26
Magherafelt	0	1	1	3	2
Moyle	2	5	9	4	4
Newry & Mourne	17	13	23	18	19
Newtownabbey	47	26	33	33	34
North Down	26	25	18	10	11
Omagh	4	7	5	5	7
Strabane	5	5	4	1	4
Total	529	516	531	430	474

*Calendar year

Community Safety Grants

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of how community safety grants are distributed by local councils.

(AQW 4513/10)

Minister of the Environment: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on a funding scheme, the conditions of which have been set by Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

Grievances by Local Council Staff

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of staff grievances brought by local council staff against their employer in each of the last five years; (ii) the number of these grievances which (a) were upheld; (b) were dismissed; and (c) are outstanding; (iii) the number of cases which resulted in compensation being awarded to the employee; and (iv) the total of the compensation paid.

(AQW 4515/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of staff grievances and the outcome for the last five years is detailed in the tables below.

AQW 4515-10 STAFF GRIEVANCES 2004/2005

Council	Number	Upheld	Dismissed	Outstanding	Withdrawn	Compensation £
Antrim	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ards	5	3	2	0	0	0
Armagh	3	0	3	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	18	2	9	0	7	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coleraine	1	0	1	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Derry	1	0	1	0	0	5,000
Down	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dungannon & S Tyrone	4	0	2	0	2	10,000
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn*	9	4	5	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne*	5	1	3	1	0	0
Newtownabbey*	8	4	4	0	0	0
North Down*	3	0	3	0	0	0
Omagh*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	2	2	0	0	0	0
Total	59	16	33	1	9	15,000

* Calendar years

N/A not readily available in time permitted

AQW 4515-10 STAFF GRIEVANCES 2005/2006

Council	Number	Upheld	Dismissed	Outstanding	Withdrawn	Compensation £
Antrim	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ards	3	3	0	0	0	0
Armagh	2	0	2	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	20	8	7	0	5	0
Carrickfergus	1	0	0	0	1	0
Castlereagh	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	0	0	0	0	0	0
Derry	0	0	0	0	0	0
Down	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dungannon & S Tyrone	1	1	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	1	0	1	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn*	5	0	5	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne*	12	0	11	0	1	0
Newtownabbey*	4	2	2	0	0	318
North Down*	7	1	6	0	0	10,000
Omagh*	1	1	0	0	0	0
Strabane	2	2	0	0	0	0
Total	59	18	34	0	7	10,318

* Calendar years

N/A not readily available in time permitted

AQW 4515-10 STAFF GRIEVANCES 2006/2007

Council	Number	Upheld	Dismissed	Outstanding	Withdrawn	Compensation £
Antrim	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ards	3	0	3	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	1	1	0	0	0	40,000
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	9	1	8	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	2	1	0	0	1	5,000
Castlereagh	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	23	3	16	4	0	1,000
Derry	2	0	2	0	0	9,126
Down	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dungannon & S Tyrone	8	3	1	0	4	2,283
Fermanagh	2	0	2	0	0	0
Larne	1	0	1	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn*	5	1	4	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne*	19	3	14	0	2	0
Newtownabbey*	3	1	2	0	0	151,905
North Down*	4	0	4	0	0	0
Omagh*	4	3	1	0	0	0
Strabane	2	2	0	0	0	0
Total	88	19	58	4	7	209,314

* Calendar years

N/A not readily available in time permitted

AQW 4515-10 STAFF GRIEVANCES 2007/2008

Council	Number	Upheld	Dismissed	Outstanding	Withdrawn	Compensation £
Antrim	5	2	3	0	0	0
Ards	3	0	3	0	0	0
Armagh	2	0	2	0	0	0
Ballymena	1	0	1	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	20	2	11	2	5	0
Carrickfergus	1	1	0	0	0	2,500
Castlereagh	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coleraine	9	5	2	1	1	26,186
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	10	0	7	3	0	7,000
Derry	3	1	2	0	0	53,221
Down	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dungannon & S Tyrone	12	10	2	0	0	39,245
Fermanagh	12	0	12	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn*	8	2	6	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne*	26	3	15	3	5	0
Newtownabbey*	12	3	9	0	0	20
North Down*	3	0	3	0	0	0
Omagh*	1	0	1	0	0	0
Strabane	2	2	0	0	0	0
Total	130	31	79	9	11	128,172

* Calendar years

N/A not readily available in time permitted

AQW 4515-10 STAFF GRIEVANCES 2008/2009

Council	Number	Upheld	Dismissed	Outstanding	Withdrawn	Compensation
Antrim	8	0	8	0	0	0
Ards	2	1	1	0	0	0
Armagh	3	0	3	0	0	0
Ballymena	1	0	0	1	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast	44	8	22	4	10	0
Carrickfergus	6	2	1	0	3	22,550
Castlereagh	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	31	3	0	3	0	0
Derry	2	0	2	0	2	17,000
Down	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Dungannon & S Tyrone	1	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Larne	1	0	1	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn*	6	3	3	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne*	18	0	7	7	4	0
Newtownabbey*	4	0	4	0	0	0
North Down*	8	0	7	1	0	0
Omagh*	7	1	3	3	0	0
Strabane	1	1	0	0	0	0
Total	143	19	62	19	19	39,550

* Calendar years

N/A not readily available in time permitted

Publishing of Council Minutes Online

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list (i) those councils who publish minutes of their meetings online and have a link to these minutes on the home page of their website; and (ii) those councils who do not.

(AQW 4522/10)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Twenty four of the twenty six district councils publish minutes of their meetings online and 23 of those provide a direct link from their website home page, Derry City Council provides a link from the online A-Z page of their website.
- (ii) Castlereagh Borough Council and Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council do not publish minutes online.

Council Minutes

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list the councils who do not publish minutes of all (i) council meetings; and (ii) committee meetings.

(AQW 4532/10)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) Castlereagh Borough Council and Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council do not publish minutes of council meetings.
- (ii) Castlereagh Borough Council, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council do not publish committee meeting minutes. Magherafelt District Council and Moyle District Council do not have any committees so minutes are not produced.

Planning Applications from Adam Armstrong

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times since 2003 has Mrs Iris Robinson made representations to the Planning Service in relation to planning applications which were submitted by Adam Armstrong and associated companies, including R&A Developments and Mar Properties; and (ii) to list these planning applications.

(AQW 4536/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department's records indicated that since 2003, Mrs Iris Robinson made a number of representations on 4 planning applications submitted by Adam Armstrong and associated companies including R & A Developments and Mar Properties. The list of planning applications is provided below.

However, it should be noted that the details of the Directors of a company are seldom relevant to the processing of a planning application as planning permission relates to the land rather than an individual.

Planning Application	Applicant	Proposal	Location
Y/2004/0118/F	Mar Properties Ltd	Erection of 6 No dwellings	Elim Pentecostal Church Youth Hall, Grand Prix Park, Ballybeen, Dundonald
X/2005/0653/O	Castlebawn Ltd	Retail proposals	Newtownards
X/2005/1156/F	Tescos Stores Ltd & Castlebawn Ltd	Retail proposals	Newtownards

Planning Application	Applicant	Proposal	Location
X/2009/0465/F	Tescos Stores Ltd & Castlebawn Ltd	Retail proposals	Newtownards

This is not a definitive list and to provide accurate figures for the information requested would require both a company search and manual checking of files which is disproportionate in terms of time and cost.

Planning Applications from Adam Armstrong

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many times since 2003 has Mr Peter Robinson MP, MLA made representations to the Planning Service in relation to planning applications which were submitted by Adam Armstrong and associated companies, including R&A Developments and Mar Properties; and (ii) to list these planning applications.

(AQW 4537/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department's records indicate that since 2003 Mr Peter Robinson made no representations to planning applications by Adam Armstrong and associated companies including R&A Developments and Mar Properties.

It should be noted that the details of the Directors of a company are seldom relevant to the processing of a planning application as planning permission relates to land rather than an individual.

As it is not uncommon for developers to establish a company to deal with a specific development proposal to provide accurate figures for the information requested would require both a company search and manual checking of files which is disproportionate in terms of time and cost.

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to list any political representation on record in support of his Department's decision to overturn a Planning Appeals Commission verdict in 1983 against a housing development at Cairnshill, Newtownbreda.

(AQW 4539/10)

Minister of the Environment: In February 1983, Mr David Mitchell MP - Parliamentary Under Secretary responsible for the Department of the Environment at that time - granted outline planning permission for residential development on lands at Cairnshill, Newtownbreda.

In making his decision, Mr Mitchell said he had tried to strike a balance between the demand - at that time - for new housing in South and East Belfast, the views of Castlereagh District Council and the views of local residents. His decision followed careful consideration of a report on the proposal by the Planning Appeals Commission.

The views of the Council were the only political representations that were made in respect of the application; the Council raised no objection in principle to housing on the site but registered their concerns about the number of proposed dwellings to be built.

Mourne Heritage Trust

Mr D Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department has considered establishing a Service Level Agreement with the Mourne Heritage Trust.

(AQW 4552/10)

Minister of the Environment: NIEA is currently reviewing its funding arrangements for all the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty management bodies; this will include consideration of the merits of Service Level Agreements (SLA) as opposed to grant aid. If it is concluded that an SLA is a preferable funding mechanism then NIEA will discuss establishing an SLA with Mourne Heritage Trust at an appropriate stage.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency Education Sites

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 3648/10, to detail (i) the number of Northern Ireland Environment Agency education sites; and (ii) the locations of these sites.

(AQW 4558/10)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency provides an education service at five sites. They are located at:

- Crawfordsburn Country Park
- Peatlands Park
- Carrickfergus Castle
- Castle Archdale Country Park
- Roe Valley Country Park

Occasional visits may be arranged at other sites, but these would be infrequent.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency Sites

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how many schools in each Education and Library Board area have visited Northern Ireland Environment Agency sites with Educators, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4559/10)

Minister of the Environment: The number of schools in each of the Education and Library Board areas who have visited NIEA sites with Educators is set out in the table below:-

	2007	2008	2009	Total
BELB	55	56	60	171
NEELB	66	83	101	250
SEELB	42	51	53	146
SELB	58	64	45	167
WELB	97	86	67	250
Total	318	340	326	984

Ards and Down Area Plan

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of staff currently working on the Ards and Down Area Plan; (ii) the estimated cost of producing the plan; and (iii) a timescale for its completion.

(AQW 4582/10)

Minister of the Environment: The *Ards and Down Area Plan* was adopted on 30 March 2009, after a lengthy process that began with its initiation in 1999. This involved extensive consultation with both the public and the Council, and a public inquiry where objections to the Plan were heard by the Planning Appeals Commission.

The number of staff working in the Ards and Down Team was reduced following the adoption of the Plan and there are currently two members of staff working full time on tasks associated with the Ards and Down Plan and two members of staff working on a part time basis. Since work commenced on the Plan in 1999, just over £4,000,000 has been spent on the Plan process.

Access to Public Land for Horse-riders

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to increase access to public land for horse-riders.

(AQW 4606/10)

Minister of the Environment: My Department provides facilities for horse-riders at three of its Country Parks. Otherwise horse riding is not permitted at NIEA properties because of concerns relating to the safety of other users.

It is for other Departments and local Councils to consider whether they can accommodate horse-riders at their properties.

Bridleways

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what steps are being taken to increase the number of bridleways available for use by horse-riders.

(AQW 4608/10)

Minister of the Environment: Responsibility for the assertion, protection and provision of bridleways lies with District Councils under the Access to the Countryside (Northern Ireland) Order 1983.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, through its Natural Heritage Grants Programme, supports the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN). CAAN's objectives include working with the British Horse Society on the development of off-road horse riding trails for public use.

Nitrates Directive Action Programme

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment how many farms breached the Nitrates Directive Action Programme by spreading slurry between 16 October 2009 and 31 January 2010.

(AQW 4625/10)

Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland Environment Agency officers investigated and confirmed 8 breaches of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations involving farmers spreading slurry during the closed period 16 October 2009 to 31 January 2010.

Good Relations Remit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff are currently employed under the Good Relations remit of each council.

(AQW 4653/10)

Minister of the Environment: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Councils are statutory authorities with their own equality duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including responsibility for promoting good relations. The employment of staff for this purpose is therefore a matter for individual councils.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment if he will publish all reports commissioned by the Planning Service, including those assessing noise levels, which were used in its consideration of the planning application to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 4665/10)

Minister of the Environment: The application to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport has been designated by the Planning Service as being of major importance under Article 31 of the

Planning (NI) Order 1991. This means that the decision on the application will be taken by me as the Minister of the Environment. In considering the application and in the preparation of advice for me on the matter, the Planning Service commissioned an independent report to consider noise aspects associated with the application. While the planning application file can be viewed under the Open File policy, some documents cannot be released at this stage. The independent noise report is one such document since this is currently an internal document which remains under consideration and review by the Planning Service as part of the process involved in preparing advice for me on the application under Article 31 procedures.

The decision not to release the noise report at this time has been taken in accordance with regulation 12(4)(e) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

I recognise the significant interest in this application and I can assure you that the noise report will be released as soon as I am in a position to do so.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of whether the plans for the proposed extension of George Best Belfast City Airport should be classed as a major planning application; and if so, whether a public enquiry will be held.

(AQW 4696/10)

Minister of the Environment: The planning application for an extension to the runway at the George Best Belfast City Airport was designated as one of major importance under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 on 23 December 2008. Under the Article 31 procedure one option open to my Department is to cause a public local inquiry to be held by the Planning Appeals Commission. However, until such time as consideration of the proposal has been finalised it is not possible to confirm the procedural route to be adopted. My officials are progressing the application as quickly as it is possible to do so and expect to be in a position to make a recommendation to me on the way forward in the near future.

Careful consideration will be given to all the issues that have been raised in representations to my Department including noise contours, health impact assessments and passenger numbers.

In line with Article 31(5) of the 1991 Order the decision of the Department on an application to which this Article applies shall be final. In my role as Minister of the Environment I will therefore be responsible for making the final decision. As is normal practice with Article 31 applications I will be writing to all MLAs, including Executive colleagues to inform them of my decision.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if he will take into account (i) noise contours; (ii) health impact assessments; and (iii) passenger numbers when considering plans for the proposed extension of the runway at the George Best Belfast City Airport.

(AQW 4697/10)

Minister of the Environment: The planning application for an extension to the runway at the George Best Belfast City Airport was designated as one of major importance under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 on 23 December 2008. Under the Article 31 procedure one option open to my Department is to cause a public local inquiry to be held by the Planning Appeals Commission. However, until such time as consideration of the proposal has been finalised it is not possible to confirm the procedural route to be adopted. My officials are progressing the application as quickly as it is possible to do so and expect to be in a position to make a recommendation to me on the way forward in the near future.

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George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if the planning application for the proposed extension of the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport will require final approval from the Executive. **(AQW 4698/10)**

Minister of the Environment: The planning application for an extension to the runway at the George Best Belfast City Airport was designated as one of major importance under Article 31 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 on 23 December 2008. Under the Article 31 procedure one option open to my Department is to cause a public local inquiry to be held by the Planning Appeals Commission. However, until such time as consideration of the proposal has been finalised it is not possible to confirm the procedural route to be adopted. My officials are progressing the application as quickly as it is possible to do so and expect to be in a position to make a recommendation to me on the way forward in the near future.

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Department of Finance and Personnel

Rates Arrears

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the current level of rates arrears is. **(AQW 4430/10)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): At any point in time, the total amount of ratepayer debt comprises two elements: the previous years' ratepayer debt and in-year debt.

At 31 January 2010, the previous years' ratepayer debt of £138 million at 31 March 2009 had been reduced to £77 million.

It is difficult to quantify in-year ratepayer debt given that, as part of normal business, bills are issued on a daily basis. Therefore, debt for the 2009-2010 year will not be known with certainty until the Statement of Rate Levy & Collection is completed in May 2010.

The collection of all rates due remains a very high priority for Land & Property Services, and rigorous pursuit of outstanding debt continues.

Rate Collection Target

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the performance of Land and Property Services in relation to rate collection and achieving the 98% collection target. **(AQW 4431/10)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 31 January 2010, Land & Property Services had collected rates to the value of £930 million. This compares with £910 million at the same time last year. In-year collection of rates at 31 January against the Agency's key target was 91%.

Because of the many factors that contribute to the collection target, it is difficult to predict with certainty what the end of year figure will be. However, despite the difficult financial climate, Land & Property Services continues on a daily basis to issue rate bills, collect money due, and take debt recovery action on unpaid rates.

BBC Spotlight programme

Mr C McDevitt asked the minister of Finance and Personnel (i) if he can confirm that his Department issued instructions to the Departmental Solicitor's Office arising from which Mr Paul Maguire QC was appointed to provide an opinion on matters raised in the BBC Spotlight programme of January 7 2010; and (ii) whether Mr Paul Maguire QC was appointed by official instruction, and if so, by officials at which grade and in which Department.

(AQW 4451/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Departmental Solicitor's Office instructed Senior Crown Counsel to provide an Opinion arising from the BBC Spotlight programme of January 7 2010 at the request of the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

BBC Spotlight Programme

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the instructions issued by the Departmental Solicitor's Office to Mr Paul Maguire QC regarding the opinion he has been asked to provide on allegations raised in the BBC Spotlight Programme of 7 January 2010.

(AQW 4452/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not appropriate to provide details of the instructions sent to Counsel other than to state that advice was sought in relation to the allegation in the Spotlight programme that the First Minister acted in breach of the Ministerial Code, Ministerial Code of Conduct and the Pledge of Office.

BBC Spotlight Programme

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when Mr Paul Maguire QC will deliver his opinion on the conduct of the First Minister regarding the allegations made in the BBC Spotlight Programme of 7 January 2010.

(AQW 4453/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Senior Crown Counsel delivered his Opinion on 3 February 2010.

Rate Allowances

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if rate allowances are available to tenants who hold long-term leases on properties and will not benefit from the sale of the property; and if not, why not.

(AQW 4512/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not necessarily the case that tenants who hold long term leases do not benefit financially from the sale of a property, particularly if there are a number of years unexpired on the lease.

Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the rating system operates on the basis of occupation and is blind to the way in which a property is held. This applies whether the ratepayer is a householder or business and whether the property is held under a lease or a freehold.

Rating legislation contains title assumptions on which the capital or net annual value is based, regardless of the person's actual interest in the property. For domestic property it is assumed that it is sold with vacant possession and a fee simple absolute or, in the case of a flat, a lease for 99 years.

For non domestic property it is assumed it is held under lease from year to year. One exception is the social housing sector where the value is assessed as a standard percentage addition to the rent charged for the property and paid by the landlord.

Landlord allowances can apply to the owners of properties let out to transient tenants. These are mostly (but not exclusively) houses, including those in multiple occupation, though it does not make any difference whether the landlord holds a long lease or a freehold interest in the property.

Generally all entitlements, reliefs, allowances and discounts apply equally to all ratepayers within the broad sector concerned (domestic and commercial) irrespective of the way in which the property is held.

Three new schemes will come into effect this April, which, for good reasons, will only apply to owner occupiers in the domestic sector; a pensioner deferment scheme and green rebate scheme.

Rate Arrears

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many non-domestic properties are currently in rate arrears since the introduction of the new Net Annual Value.

(AQW 4581/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As of 7 February 2010, there were 12,858 non-domestic ratepayers with ratepayer debt dating from 31 March 2009 or earlier. It is difficult to quantify in-year ratepayer debt given that, as part of normal business, bills are issued on a daily basis. Therefore, debt for the 2009-2010 year will not be known with certainty until the Statement of Rate Levy & Collection is completed in May 2010.

The collection of all rates due remains a very high priority for Land & Property Services, and rigorous pursuit of outstanding debt continues.

Net Annual Values have been the basis of Non-Domestic rating in Northern Ireland since 1972.

Equal Pay Offer

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has had any discussions with NIPSA regarding former civil servants who left the service prior to August 2008 and are not eligible under the Equal Pay offer.

(AQW 4596/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have had two meetings with NIPSA to discuss, in general terms, the overall approach to resolving the equal pay issue. These meetings did not cover the detail of the component elements of the settlement. The specific aspects of the settlement, including the eligibility of former civil servants to benefit from any settlement, have been addressed by my officials in great detail in their negotiations with NIPSA. The proposed settlement negotiated by my officials has been accepted by NIPSA and plans are being made for its implementation with NIPSA's full support.

Rate Arrears

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of households; and (ii) the total amount owed in rate arrears, in (a) Northern Ireland as a whole; and (b) each local Council area.

(AQW 4633/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below summarises the numbers of domestic properties with ratepayer debt dating from 31 March 2009 or earlier, the total amount of domestic ratepayer debt, and its breakdown between District Council areas which remains uncollected as at 10 February 2010. It is difficult to quantify in-year ratepayer debt given that, as part of normal business, bills are issued on a daily basis. The debt for the 2009-2010 year will not be known with certainty until the Statement of Rate Levy & Collection is completed in May 2010 and therefore the figures in the table exclude in-year debt.

The collection of all rates due remains a very high priority for Land & Property Services, and rigorous pursuit of outstanding debt continues. This includes agreeing payment arrangements where ratepayers are having difficulties paying the outstanding debt.

District Council	Amount of domestic ratepayer debt £	Number of domestic occupancies with pre-March 2009 ratepayer debt
Antrim	659,557	956
Ards	1,248,180	1,999
Armagh	1,171,809	1,581
Ballymena	408,291	802
Ballymoney	316,791	530
Banbridge	768,902	1,251
Belfast	7,886,073	12,657
Carrickfergus	707,447	1,082
Castlereagh	721,286	1,235
Coleraine	774,060	1,326
Cookstown	350,453	656
Craigavon	1,477,500	2,753
Down	1,367,465	2,008
Dungannon & South Tyrone	625,720	974
Fermanagh	600,991	981
Larne	310,214	593
Limavady	416,972	743
Lisburn	1,759,162	2,507
Derry	1,963,115	3,464
Magherafelt	309,015	614
Moyle	235,463	322
Newry & Mourne	1,746,173	2,706
Newtownabbey	1,334,008	2,204
North down	1,282,137	2,170
Omagh	510,684	782
Strabane	559,081	1,021
Totals	29,510,549	47,917

Notes:

The LPS rating system records occupancies, not households.

The above figures exclude mixed properties that have both a domestic and non-domestic valuation.

Dormant Bank Accounts

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he would consider introducing a scheme to allow money from dormant bank accounts to be used to address child poverty.

(AQW 4651/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Under the terms of the legislation, the scheme provides a general definition of “social or environmental purposes” on which unclaimed assets must be spent. The legislation also provides for the devolved administrations to determine their own priorities for distribution which reflect the needs of the community within this over-arching theme.

Public consultation on the spending priorities for the Northern Ireland Dormant Accounts Scheme was held between 6th August and 29 October 2009.

127 responses were received from a broad range of private individuals and organisations representing community and voluntary organisations, faith based organisations, children and young people organisations, organisations supporting the elderly and disabled, statutory authorities, charities and financial institutions. I am currently considering these responses to ensure that a focused set of priorities is established and that the additional money is used to provide real benefits to all communities across Northern Ireland.

Subject to endorsement by OFMDFM, I will bring recommendations on the proposed spending priorities to the Executive in due course.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Fairtrade Products

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many contracts for the provision of staff uniforms and bed clothes in the Health Service currently have a requirement to include Fairtrade fabrics; and (ii) how many catering contracts, managed by his Department or the Health and Social Care Trusts, currently have a requirement to include Fairtrade products.

(AQW 4387/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): Procurement in these fields is governed by the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and Amendment Regulations 2009, which stipulate open, fair and equitable tendering of goods and services. The tendering process may also take specific account of ethical trading principles – for example, in requiring traders to have in place a policy on ethical trading, or adherence to the European Commission’s Green Public Procurement guidelines for textiles. It would be inconsistent with that legal framework to favour any particular brand, such as Fairtrade, above others.

Physiotherapists

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many physiotherapists with a specialist knowledge of Multiple Sclerosis currently operate in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 4399/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The requested information is provided in the table below.

Physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills who will treat patients with Multiple Sclerosis

Trust	Headcount	WTE1
Belfast	9	7.27

Trust	Headcount	WTE1
Northern	2	2
South Eastern	12	9.4
Southern	9	8
Western	12	10.22

Source: Health & Social Care Trusts

Notes: 1 WTE= whole-time equivalent

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available to people diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4400/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: People diagnosed with multiple sclerosis have access to the full range of core community health and social care services across Northern Ireland including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, community nursing, speech and language therapy, dietetics, social work / social care, domiciliary care, day care and day time opportunities and respite, including specialist respite.

Physiotherapists

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any plans to increase the number of physiotherapists with specialist knowledge of Multiple Sclerosis over the next three years.

(AQW 4401/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst there are no specialist physiotherapists assigned exclusively to work with Multiple Sclerosis patients, sufferers are assessed and treated by specialist physiotherapists with neuro-disability skills in all of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, as part of their caseload. All physiotherapists study neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis, during their undergraduate training. As part of their continuing professional development, registered physiotherapists receive training in advanced clinical skills, which can be used in delivering services to patients with Multiple Sclerosis.

Recourse Issues for Nursing and Skills Mix Staff

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many incident report no1 forms have been lodged in relation to recourse issues for nursing and skills mix staff, with particular reference to Neuro Science and the Fracture Trauma Unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4436/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below displays the total number of incident reports forms for the Neuro Science and Fracture Trauma Unit in the Royal Victoria Hospital in each of the last three years.

INCIDENT SUMMARY REPORT: RESOURCE ISSUES FOR NURSING & SKILL MIX STAFF FRACTURES TRAUMA UNIT & NEUROSCIENCES RVH 2007, 2008 2009

	2007	2008	2009
Fractures Trauma Unit	46	35	100

	2007	2008	2009
Neurosciences	08	01	14

(Source Belfast Trust)

Royal Hospital Staff

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff within the Royal Hospital have been referred for stress counselling and to occupational health for work related issues in each of the last three years, broken down by specialty and an indication whether each case was a self-referral or a management referral.

(AQW 4437/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of Occupational Health Service (OHS) referrals by management and from individuals at the Royal Group of Hospitals is set out below. Information is available from April 2006 until August 2008. From September 2008, the RGHT OHS was subsumed into the wider occupational health service within the Belfast HSC Trust, with data then recorded for all Trust employees. Stress counselling data is not readily available as this was a self-referral confidential service. Speciality is also not readily available.

ROYAL GROUP OF HOSPITALS OHS REFERRALS

	Apr '06 to March '07 (inc)		Apr '07 to Mar '08 (inc)		Apr '08 to Aug '08 (inc)	
Work related OHS	Mgmt Ref	19	Mgmt Ref	9	Mgmt Ref	0
Referral	Self Ref	0	Self Ref	2	Self Ref	0

Stress-related Absenteeism among Royal Hospital Nursing Staff

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the levels of stress-related absenteeism among Royal Hospital nursing staff in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; and (iii) 2009, broken down by nursing specialty.

(AQW 4438/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department does not collect sickness absence data by the specific hospital or specialty but by the Nursing and Midwifery terms and conditions group. The information is presented by Trust and is published on a bi-annual basis on the departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm.

Private Medical Consultancy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust spent £35m on private medical consultancy in a bid to reduce waiting times, how many of the consultants used hold Health Service contracts; and how many patients used this service.

(AQW 4439/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of consultants used who hold Health Service contracts could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Health of Residents of the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any plans his Department has to improve the health of residents of the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 4467/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are a range of health and wellbeing initiatives currently being delivered in, or have been made available to groups and organisations in the Kilcooley area.

This work continues and the local community is being actively encouraged to engage in health and well being planning processes.

As a result of the implementation of the Investing for Health Strategy in the Eastern Area a number of Community Development and Health Workers (CDHW) have been employed

The local Partnership, which oversees the North Down & Ards Health Improvement Plan, provides funding for infrastructure and support for programme resources to a number of local voluntary organisations across the area.

The South Eastern HSC Trust (SET) and the Kilcooley Community Forum, in partnership with DSD, have provided a mental health worker specifically for the Kilcooley Estate

Health Debates

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons for his absence from a number of recent health debates in the Assembly, given that there is no longer the same demand on his time following a reduction in the reported number of cases of swine flu.

(AQW 4472/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I indicated to the Business Committee that I was not available for Assembly business on 2 February. Despite this notification, I was named to respond to the motion on financial aid and advice services for people undergoing cancer treatment on that date – a motion I thought, in any case, more appropriate to my Department of Social Development ministerial colleague.

I have not been absent from any other recent health debates in the Assembly.

Diabetes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with (i) Type 1 diabetes; and (ii) Type 2 diabetes in (a) Ards; (b) Strangford; and (c) Northern Ireland in total, in the past twelve months.

(AQW 4474/10)

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

Diabetes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that Diabetes UK estimate that 12,500 people here are unaware that they have diabetes, to outline his Department's strategy for increasing awareness of the need for diabetes checks.

(AQW 4476/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has a range of public health and health promotion strategies in place which seek to raise public awareness of diabetes and the factors which can lead to the development of diabetes. Patients who are concerned about their risk of developing diabetes can seek advice from their GP and other healthcare professionals. Primary

Care teams will also routinely identify patients with a high risk of having diabetes in the context of cardiovascular risk assessment.

Blood Sugar Levels of Children

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is an initiative between his Department and the Department of Education to check the blood sugar levels of children in primary or secondary schools.

(AQW 4478/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The UK National Screening Committee's view is that there is no justification for universal population screening for diabetes and there is no national initiative to check the blood sugar levels of children in primary or secondary schools.

However, my Department and the Department of Education, together with the Public Health Agency have been working on a joint initiative since autumn 2007 to improve nutrition standards and to promote healthy eating in schools.

Programmes also exist across the Province for all Year 1 and Year 8/9 children to have their weight checked by the school nurse and any children with problems of over- or underweight are referred to the Dietetic Service.

Pay for Health Trust Chief Executives and Board Members

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who sets the pay rates for Chief Executives and board members of Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 4487/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Since May 2007 the Executive has placed the responsibility for setting Public Sector Pay policy with the Department of Finance and Personnel Minister.

DHSSPS Budget

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of this years budget will be recurrent next year.

(AQW 4501/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Out of the total allocation made, more than £3.2billion or 80% of this year's budget will be made recurrent next year.

Dementia

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are diagnosed with dementia in the age bracket (i) 50-60; (ii) 61-70; and (iii) 71 and above.

(AQW 4508/10)

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

Funding for Dementia Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding was allocated to dementia services in each of the last two financial years; and how much has been set aside for this financial year.

(AQW 4510/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer provided in AQW 3255/10.

Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there is a requirement on medical practitioners to seek information from a child's school before completing an assessment for diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder; and if so, whether this happens in practice.

(AQW 4525/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Paediatricians do not diagnose ADHD without completion of the Conners' rating scale by a teacher who knows the child.

Day Centres for People with a Learning Disability

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many day centres for people with a learning disability currently operate in each Health and Social Care Trust area; (ii) how many of these have been certified as registered with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority; and (iii) to indicate the average timeframe between application for registration and final certification of such facilities.

(AQW 4546/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The table below provides a breakdown of the number of day care centres for people with a learning disability operating in each HSC Trust area.

HSC Trust	Day Care Settings (statutory & voluntary)
Belfast	28
Northern	37
South Eastern	30
Southern	39
Western	56

- (ii) There are 26 registered statutory day care centres for people with a learning disability.
- (iii) The average timeframe between application for registration and final certification in respect of these 26 facilities is 472 days. There is however considerable variation between the shortest time and longest, which is determined by the details of each individual application.

Ravara House, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently resident in Ravara House, Bangor.

(AQW 4550/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust indicated that, as at 8th February 2010, there are currently 40 residents in Ravara House, Bangor.

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings have been aimed at health quangos.

(AQW 4551/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I interpret your request to relate to Arms Length Bodies of the Department. No part of the system has been exempted.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many medical practitioners in the Newry area are qualified to treat patients diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis; (ii) how accessible are MS services in this area for patients; and (iii) if he will conduct a review of the treatment afforded to patients diagnosed with MS within this area to ascertain how services can be improved.
(AQW 4553/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 3 Consultant Neurologists working within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. All are qualified to treat patients diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. There is also a Multiple Sclerosis Specialist Nurse who is based at Craigavon Area Hospital.

In the Newry area, people with Multiple Sclerosis have access to the full range of core community health and social care provision, typically provided close to, or in, their own homes. In addition, there is a neurology clinic at Daisy Hill Hospital; a specialist MS clinic in Craigavon Area Hospital; and some people may attend the Multiple Sclerosis clinic at Belfast City Hospital.

In 2002 my Department carried out a Review of Adult Neurology Services and published recommendations for improvements in the provision and delivery of services. The Health and Social Care Board has been tasked to carry out a full and comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations and report its findings to my Department.

Provision of a Medical School in Derry

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the provision of a medical school in Derry.
(AQW 4556/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department does not currently have any plans to establish a second medical school in Northern Ireland and does not consider that a second medical school could be justified. The Department has increased significantly the investment in the number of undergraduate medical student places at Queen's University Belfast. By 2010 the output will have increased by 40%, compared with 2005.

Swine Flu Vaccine

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4101/10, to detail (i) the cost of administering a single swine flu vaccination; and (ii) the total cost of administering the swine flu vaccine to date, broken down by 'at-risk' group.
(AQW 4562/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) GPs are paid £5.25 to administer each dose of swine flu vaccine. All other costs are on a programme basis and cannot be disaggregated to single vaccine level.
- (ii) As the vaccination programme remains ongoing it is not possible to provide the total cost of administering the vaccination programme to date, broken down by 'at risk' groups.

Termination of Pregnancy Guidelines

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can offer that the interim termination of pregnancy guidelines will protect Health Service staff and uphold the rights of an unborn child.

(AQW 4722/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The withdrawal of my Department's publication "Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy: The Law and Clinical Practice in Northern Ireland" left Health Professionals without guidance on the law in Northern Ireland relating to the termination of pregnancy. The interim Guidance was issued to protect health professionals who were operating in the absence of guidance on the Northern Ireland legal framework.

The recent High Court ruling determined that the March 2009 draft of the Guidance was appropriate in its consideration of the rights of the unborn child.

The sections on conscientious objection and counselling are being redrafted. They will then be subject to a public consultation and will be put before the Executive for consideration before they are incorporated into the revised Guidance.

Department for Regional Development

iLink Card

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (1) the number of iLink cards bought at Belfast International Airport; and (2) the number of (a) single; and (b) return journeys to and from Belfast and the International Airport made using (i) iLink card; (ii) any other multi-journey card; or (iii) cash payments in each week since the iLink card was introduced.

(AQW 4414/10)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): The information you asked for is not readily available in the form requested. However, Translink has provided me with the following information:-

1. Since the introduction of iLink on 5 October 2009 until 31 January 2010, 138 iLink cards have been issued at Belfast International Airport.
2. During this period, 632 journeys have been made using iLink cards on the Translink 300 service which serves Belfast International Airport. Translink does not record whether these journeys were single journeys or part of a return journey.
3. During the same period, 17,358 journeys were made using Ulsterbus Multi-Journey cards on the Translink 300 service. Again Translink does not record whether these journeys were single journeys or part of a return journey.
4. For the period in question, summary totals show that 31,108 journeys were made through Cash Single tickets on the 300 service and 34,656 journeys made through Cash Return tickets on the service.

It should be noted that these figures do not include any journeys made by holders of concessionary Smartpasses.

Eskra Community Association

Mr B McElduff asked Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service will initiate discussions with the Eskra Community Association about working with the Eskra and Newtownsaville communities about ideas, including community self-help, to improve road conditions during freezing weather.

(AQW 4419/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is always available to meet with community groups to discuss local issues and potential solutions in accordance with established Roads Service policies. Eskra Community Association should contact Mr Derek Quinton, Section Engineer, Roads Service Western Division (028 82254620) to arrange a meeting.

Road and Street Signs

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail for each of the last five years (i) the number of road and street signs which have been ordered by his Department and subsequently repaired or replaced due to (a) spelling mistakes; (b) punctuation mistakes; (c) other grammatical errors; (d) incorrect information; (e) missing information; and (f) any other similar reason; and (ii) the associated cost of correcting these errors.

(AQW 4441/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not hold information on those road signs, that it has ordered, which had to be repaired or replaced due to errors associated with spelling, punctuation, information etc. I should point out that local councils are responsible for road naming and the provision and maintenance of the associated name plates.

Trees at Kingarve Road, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) why trees were cut down by Roads Service on private property at Kingarve Road, Dungannon, on Saturday 19 December 2009; (ii) who instructed this action; (iii) why the landowner was refused the timber after it had been cut; and (iv) what was done with the timber.

(AQW 4463/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service received two complaints from the public regarding overgrown trees at Kingarve Road, Dungannon. Following an inspection, Roads Service planned to cut back those trees overgrowing the road verge that were causing an obstruction of the road, and also, obscuring road signs and street lights. However, before this work could be undertaken, Roads Service received a call on their out of hours emergency telephone service, at approximately 7:30 am on Saturday 19 December 2009, advising that a branch had broken off one of the overgrown trees and was obstructing the road. The incident was referred to the local Roads Service supervisor, who arranged for the broken branch to be removed urgently. The supervisor also instructed the workmen to cut back the overgrown trees while they were on site with the required equipment, to avoid having to return to the location at a later date to undertake this work.

The Roads Service direct labour personnel lopped off all the overgrown branches, which were causing an obstruction along a 170 metre stretch of Kingarve Road. However, as well trimming the branches from the trees rooted in the road verge, they also, due to a misinterpretation of the instructions provided, inadvertently trimmed the branches from five trees that were not rooted in the road verge, which the landowner was responsible for maintaining. The instructions had been given by telephone, without the supervisor visiting the site, due to the work being undertaken outside of normal working hours.

I understand that when work was nearing completion, one of the landowners approached the workmen and enquired who had given them permission to cut back the trees. I also understand that, at that time, he did not request the tree cuttings, the majority of which had been shredded on site. However later, after the Roads Service staff returned to their depot, the same landowner arrived and requested that the remaining cuttings, which had not been shredded, be returned to him. The workmen did not deliver the remaining tree cuttings to the landowner, as they were unsure if he was entitled to them but shredded them later that day, therefore, they were not available to be returned to the landowners when technical staff returned to work on the Monday morning. I can confirm, however, that the shredded material is still being held in Moygashel depot.

I should advise that, if Roads Service has to cut trees owned by landowners for reasons of road safety, the current policy is that the cuttings are to be placed on the landowner's land, near where the

cutting took place, as the cuttings remain the property of that landowner. Roads Service has asked the Department's Central Claims Unit to investigate this case and advise the landowners concerned on the matter of compensation for tree cuttings retained by Roads Service.

Roads Service has confirmed that the amount of tree trimming undertaken at Kingarve Road was limited to that which the landowners would have been obliged to complete in order to remove the obstruction of the road.

Roads Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Roads Service has spent in each constituency, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4464/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not record details of its spend on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, it does keep details of its actual spend on Operation and Maintenance activities and Capital, during the preceding financial year, in each Council area.

The tables below detail the spend in each Council area, during the last three years:

District Council	Operation & Maintenance Spend		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Antrim	£3,251,000	£3,494,000	£3,507,000
Coleraine	£4,139,000	£4,449,000	£4,275,000
Limavady	£2,737,000	£3,573,000	£2,830,000
Moyle	£1,860,000	£2,093,000	£1,674,000
Ballymoney	£2,283,000	£2,430,000	£2,395,000
Derry	£5,281,000	£5,828,000	£5,876,000
Ballymena	£4,432,000	£4,537,000	£5,168,000
Larne	£2,754,000	£2,546,000	£2,238,000
Belfast	£13,730,000	£16,990,000	£13,976,000
Castlereagh	£3,029,000	£3,552,000	£3,429,000
Newtownabbey	£3,189,000	£4,576,000	£3,388,000
Carrickfergus	£1,764,000	£1,971,000	£1,642,000
North Down	£3,640,000	£3,974,000	£2,962,000
Lisburn	£5,695,000	£4,948,000	£7,704,000
Ards	£3,468,000	£5,014,000	£3,394,000
Armagh	£5,477,000	£7,539,000	£7,013,000
Newry & Mourne	£5,843,000	£6,212,000	£5,372,000
Banbridge	£3,841,000	£3,996,000	£3,404,000
Craigavon	£5,217,000	£5,478,000	£4,219,000
Down	£4,503,000	£4,262,000	£5,813,000
Magherafelt	£2,612,000	£3,834,000	£3,239,000

District Council	Operation & Maintenance Spend		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Omagh	£5,587,000	£6,487,000	£5,699,000
Strabane	£4,746,000	£5,258,000	£5,068,000
Cookstown	£2,857,000	£2,759,000	£2,739,000
Fermanagh	£6,737,000	£6,598,000	£7,036,000
Dungannon	£5,477,000	£5,781,000	£5,391,000
Totals	£114,149,000	£128,179,000	£119,451,000

District Council	Capital Spend		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Antrim	£2,801,000	£1,970,000	£848,000
Coleraine	£1,380,000	£2,090,000	£1,745,000
Limavady	£1,145,000	£1,450,000	£1,406,000
Moyle	£177,000	£287,000	£464,000
Ballymoney	£1,223,000	£510,000	£670,000
Derry	£3,754,000	£8,492,000	£19,397,000
Ballymena	£1,910,000	£6,170,000	£4,920,000
Larne	£346,000	£1,216,000	£2,074,000
Belfast	£26,628,000	£6,116,000	£11,503,000
Castlereagh	£835,000	£1,316,000	£444,000
Newtownabbey	£1,578,000	£1,965,000	£2,219,000
Carrickfergus	£2,566,000	£4,849,000	£4,165,000
North Down	£1,916,000	£1,770,000	£1,218,000
Lisburn	£3,673,000	£2,686,000	£2,345,000
Ards	£1,725,000	£1,960,000	£8,667,000
Armagh	£1,677,000	£3,005,000	£2,446,000
Newry & Mourne	£62,010,000	£14,863,000	£4,627,000
Banbridge	£2,221,000	£887,000	£1,251,000
Craigavon	£1,803,000	£1,658,000	£1,704,000
Down	£1,539,000	£986,000	£1,341,000
Magherafelt	£966,000	£2,651,000	£2,544,000
Omagh	£3,455,000	£4,387,000	£11,534,000
Strabane	£2,067,000	£1,296,000	£695,000
Cookstown	£1,078,000	£865,000	£1,135,000

District Council	Capital Spend		
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Fermanagh	£2,121,000	£4,017,000	£8,607,000
Dungannon	£15,361,000	£14,235,000	£4,622,000
Totals	£145,955,000	£91,697,000	£102,591,000

I should advise the Member that Roads Service does not simply split its total budget for capital expenditure on roads across all the district council areas. Major road improvements are prioritised on a countrywide basis, taking account of a broad range of criteria, such as strategic planning policy, traffic flow, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact, accessibility and value for money. While the actual spend on a major works scheme may be within one district council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the district council, constituency or county in which they are located.

Traffic Management System on the Knock Road

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the impact on traffic volumes and related issues in the Cherryvalley, Kensington and Shandon Park areas of East Belfast as a result of proposed changes to the traffic management system on the Knock Road, as outlined in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and the Regional Transport Strategy, **(AQW 4469/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service published proposals to improve a narrow section of the A55 Outer Ring Road on 11 November 2009. These proposals included the widening of 1.3 km of existing road between the Glen Road and the King's Road junctions. This will provide a more consistent standard of carriageway, and improve the safety of this part of the strategic road network, as identified by the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan.

The scheme will also upgrade the traffic signals at the Shandon Park junction to fully control right turning movements, which will improve the poor safety record of this junction. This signal phasing will be configured to minimise the available green time for traffic turning right into, and exiting left from, Shandon Park. This will act as a control on the volume of traffic that can access Shandon Park.

I can advise the Member that an assessment has been made of the anticipated additional traffic levels along Shandon Park, Kensington Road and Cherryvalley when the scheme is constructed. Although the proposed arrangement may increase traffic levels during peak periods in Shandon Park, the increase in flow over an all day period is estimated to be of the order of 5%. Therefore, it is not expected that there will be any significant increase in traffic levels in Kensington Road and Cherryvalley as a result of the scheme. However, it should be noted that traffic levels are expected to increase in the longer term, as a result of general traffic growth, irrespective of whether the scheme is implemented or not.

You will also be aware that traffic calming has recently been introduced along Shandon Park and Kensington Road to reduce the speeds of all vehicles, and improve safety within the area.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the internal investigations carried out by NI Water on contracts it has awarded in each of the last five years; (ii) the financial value of these contracts; and (iii) to detail the outcome of those investigations which have been completed. **(AQW 4494/10)**

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that since it was appointed water and sewerage undertaker on 1 April 2007, investigations have been carried out on

two contracts it awarded, following allegations relating to their procurement. The information requested in relation to these contracts is included in the table below:-

Contract Details	Financial Value of Contract	Outcome of Investigation
C335 maintenance of telecommunications network.	£3.7 million over 3 years	No substance to the allegations.
C071 provision of temporary technical support.	£5.9 million over 5 years.	Not yet complete but current evidence has not revealed any substance to the allegations.

In line with normal good practice NIW has also undertaken a number of internal audits, relating to contracts, in the following areas:-

- Customer billing and contact.
- Capital Works Programme.
- Engineering Procurement.
- Steria Exit.
- All contracts (excluding the Capital Works Programme).

A number of recommendations resulting from these internal audits have been accepted by management and an action plan for implementation is underway.

In addition, NIW has undertaken regular audits of its capital works programme as part of its normal business process reviews and Post Project Evaluations on a large number of contracts. Recommendations from these audits and lessons learnt from Post Project Evaluations have been incorporated into project delivery in a programme of continuous improvement.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development if, as a result of investigations, NI Water has changed the way in which it manages and processes the awarding of contracts.

(AQW 4495/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that following investigations on contract C335, recommendations in relation to the tender process and monitoring of contracts are being implemented to ensure compliance with policies and best practice and to secure value for money. Investigations on contract C071 are still ongoing.

A number of recommendations resulting from internal audits relating to contracts have been accepted by management and an action plan for implementation is underway. In addition, recommendations from audits of the capital works programme and lessons learnt from Post Project Evaluations have been incorporated into project delivery in a programme of continuous improvement.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development which departments within NI Water were investigated as part of the internal investigations into the contracts it has awarded in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4496/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that investigations on contracts C335 and C071 were both undertaken in its Telecommunications Unit.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development what contact NI Water has had with the Regulator in relation to internal investigations into contracts it has awarded in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4497/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the NI Authority for Utility Regulation was advised of the outcome of investigations on contract C335.

Easibus Service

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's plan to replace the Easibus service from Groomsport village to Bloomfield shopping centre.

(AQW 4509/10)

Minister for Regional Development: *This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that Translink intends to divert services from Ballywalter to Bangor to provide regular links between Groomsport and Bloomfield Shopping Centre. This adjustment will commence on 1 July 2010 and will also provide a direct link to the shopping centre for people living in Ballywalter and Donaghadee.*

People who cannot access the Translink services from Groomsport may be able to avail of the services supported by my Department's Rural Transport Fund and provided by the local Rural Community Transport Partnership, Down District Accessible Transport.

New Footpaths

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if funding is available for joint schemes for new footpaths in Housing Executive areas.

(AQW 4511/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not make specific funds available for co-funded schemes to provide new footways within Housing Executive areas.

Any request for a new footway is fully assessed on an individual basis. If the results of the assessment indicate a need for a footway, this request must compete for priority and funding with other similar requests for inclusion in any future Roads Service works programme.

Road Service does, however, adopt carriageways and footways within Housing Executive estates which have been constructed to the required standard and meet the adoption criteria. Maintenance of such carriageways and footways is then carried out by Roads Service.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development whether internal investigations by NI Water into contracts it has awarded concluded that (i) an NI Water employee; or (ii) a contractor has been disadvantaged as a result of the contract that was investigated.

(AQW 4530/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that an investigation into contract C335 concluded that there was no verifiable evidence that an employee or a contractor had been disadvantaged as a result of the contract.

NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if NI Water is aware of Government funding received by companies who were also awarded contracts by NI Water; (ii) to detail the value of funding given to these companies by his Department; and (iii) when the funding was awarded.

(AQW 4531/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is not aware of any Government funding received by companies to which it has awarded contracts.

A6 Dungiven-Caw Dualling Project

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision will be made for (i) pedestrian; (ii) bicycle; and (iii) other non-motorised traffic as part of the A6 Dungiven-Caw dualling project.

(AQW 4555/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, to date, work on the A6 Dungiven to Caw scheme has been concentrated on finalising the overall horizontal and vertical alignment for the new dual carriageway. The Environmental Statement for the scheme will consider all the relevant issues associated with pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorised traffic, and these will feed into the next stage scheme's detailed design phase.

Rocks or Boulders on Grass Verges

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development what legislation exists to ensure that rural dwellers do not place large rocks or boulders on grass verges on narrow rural roads.

(AQW 4573/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is an offence under Articles 59 (Removal of nuisances) and 88 (Obstruction of roads) of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 to place large boulders on publicly maintained road verges. However, in most cases, Roads Service operates a toleration policy, unless there is a clear indication that the boulders are a danger to road users.

Roads Service identifies any boulders that have been placed on road verges, and are deemed to be a hazard, during their routine maintenance inspections. Reports are also received from members of the public. As a first step, Roads Service will ask the owner/occupier of the adjacent property to remove the obstruction. Should that fail, Roads Service has discretionary powers under Article 59 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, to serve a notice on the owner/occupier requiring the removal of the danger or obstruction. If the owner/occupier fails to comply with the requirements of the notice, Roads Service may carry out the necessary works, and seek to recover the costs.

Rocks or Boulders on Grass Verges

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any enforcement action taken against people who have placed boulders or large rocks on grass verges on narrow rural roads, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4574/10)

Minister for Regional Development: As I advised the Member, in my response to Assembly Question, AQW 4573/10, it is an offence under Articles 59 (Removal of nuisances) and 88 (Obstruction of roads) of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 to place large boulders on publicly maintained road verges.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that although there have been numerous occasions over the last five years, when members of the public have been requested to remove boulders placed on road verges, all of these cases have been resolved, without the need for enforcement action.

Road Salt

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development where his Department purchases supplies of road salt.

(AQW 4578/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that they purchase salt from the Irish Salt Mining and Exploration Co. Ltd, 10 Fort Road, Kilroot, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.

Bus Service from Limavady Town to Ballarena

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to introducing a bus service from Limavady town to Ballarena railway halt to increase passenger numbers on the Londonderry to Belfast line.

(AQW 4595/10)

Minister for Regional Development: This is an operational matter for Translink. However, I have been informed that Translink currently operates a service from Limavady to Coleraine that calls at Bellarena halt but that demand from passengers wanting to transfer from the bus to the train is extremely limited.

Translink considers that the introduction of a dedicated bus service to Ballarena railway halt would not be an efficient use of its limited resources.

Gritting Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the areas where gritting services are carried out by contract staff.

(AQW 4622/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that gritting operations from its Omagh and Strabane depots are carried out solely by Roads Service staff. However, in the majority of Roads Service's depot locations, the gritting operations are carried out by a combination of contract staff and Roads Service staff. The table below lists the Roads Service depots concerned:

DEPOTS WHERE GRITTING OPERATIONS ARE CARRIED OUT BY CONTRACT STAFF AND ROADS SERVICE STAFF

Armagh	Coleraine	Cookstown
Craigavon	Ballymoney	Magherafelt
Newry	Antrim	Fivemiletown
Banbridge	Ballymena	Belfast
Seaforde	Larne	Lisburn
Derry	Enniskillen	Bangor
Limavady	Dungannon	

Resurfacing Work at Main Street, Greyabbey

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development when the resurfacing work at Main Street, Greyabbey will be completed, following the completion of work on the water and sewage system.

(AQW 4623/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that proposals to undertake work on the sewerage system at Main Street, Greyabbey are under

consideration but programme dates have not yet been set. Any work identified will be prioritised and is subject to availability of funding. The arrangements for road resurfacing work will be agreed with Roads Service nearer the commencement of the scheme.

Compensation for Falls on Defective Footpaths and Surfaces

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of compensation paid as a result of (i) falls and injuries; and (ii) damage to vehicles caused by defective footpaths and surfaces in the (a) Larne Borough Council; (b) Carrickfergus Borough Council; and (c) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4626/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit maintains claims statistics on the basis of individual Roads Service Section Office areas. The Ballymena and Larne and Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus Section Office maintenance areas however correspond roughly with District Council areas and, in particular, the variances in respect of Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey are very minor. For this reason, the information in the form requested is not readily available but has been provided below, for each of the last three financial years, in respect of the two Roads Service Section Offices. The figures represent the total costs associated with successful claims ie compensation paid plus all other costs such as legal costs.

TOTAL COST OF COMPENSATION INCLUDING LEGAL AND OTHER COSTS

	Personal Injury			Vehicle Damage		
	C'Fergus £	Larne £	N'Abbey £	C'Fergus £	Larne £	N'abbey £
2008/09	238,497.05	11,292.48	254,213.98	943.61	1,262.42	6,952.66
2007/08	16,029.76	3,690.40	232,031.05	720.81	359.07	6,161.44
2006/07	64,271.27	22,054.75	240,603.28	3,462.93	162.73	2,681.63

Handrail at Greystone Road, Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development when the handrail, to facilitate pensioners and people with disabilities, will be installed at Greystone Road, Limavady.

(AQW 4648/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service is in the process of appointing a contractor with a view of having this work completed as soon as possible.

I have asked the Acting Divisional Roads Manager for Northern Division, Deidre Mackle, to contact you when a more specific date has been agreed for the installation of the handrail.

Road and Footpath Infrastructure at Beverly Hills, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the road and footpath infrastructure at the Beverly Hills area of Bangor.

(AQW 4658/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads and Footpaths in the Bangor Area

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the roads and footpaths in the Bangor area before the new financial year.

(AQW 4659/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Roads and Footpaths in the Holywood Area

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to resurface the roads and footpaths in the Holywood area before the new financial year.

(AQW 4660/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I would remind the Member that information on the completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in my Department's Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from the Roads Service internet site at the following web address:

www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-council_reports.htm

Tender Documents C0 71 and C0 58

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development if he can confirm that embedded contract personnel engaged under NI Water's contract services tender documents C0 71 and C0 58 have signed the Official Secrets Act, and if not, why not, considering they have access to commercially sensitive information.

(AQW 4680/10)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not recognise the term 'embedded contract personnel'. The Official Secrets Act 1989 does not apply to NIW or its contractors. The employees of contractors engaged by NIW under tenders C071 and C058 were therefore not required to sign a declaration under the Official Secrets Act but have a legal obligation under Conditions of Contract to comply with a confidentiality clause relating to access to commercially sensitive information.

Compensation Paid as a Result of Defective Footpaths and Surfaces

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of compensation paid as a result of falls and injuries caused by defective roads and footpaths in the (a) Larne Borough Council; (b) Carrickfergus Borough Council; and (c) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 4690/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit maintains claims statistics on the basis of individual Roads Service Section Office areas. The Ballymena and Larne and Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus Section Office maintenance areas however correspond roughly with District Council areas and, in particular, the variances in respect of Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey are very minor. For this reason, the information in the form requested is not readily available but has been provided below, for each of the last five financial years, in respect of the two Roads Service Section Offices. The figures represent the total costs associated with successful claims ie compensation paid plus all other costs such as legal costs.

TOTAL COST OF COMPENSATION INCLUDING LEGAL AND OTHER COSTS

	Personal Injury		
	Carrickfergus £	Larne £	Newtownabbey £
2008/09	238,497.05	11,292.48	254,213.98
2007/08	16,029.76	3,690.40	232,031.05
2006/07	64,271.27	22,054.75	240,603.28
2005/06	69,042.20	54,964.08	107,832.11
2004/05	87,247.81	4,591.25	235,873.47

Laneways in Residential Areas

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail his Department's policy on the abandonment of laneways in residential areas; and (ii) for his assessment of the results of community consultation where there is an indication of a shared desire for the closure of laneways and other rights of way.

(AQW 4700/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service's policy and procedures for processing abandonment proposals, including the necessary consultations are contained within its Policy and Procedure Guide: Abandonment and Stopping-up Orders.

A copy of this document has been placed in the Library.

A26 between Glarryford and the Drones Road

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposals to dual part of the A26 between Glarryford and the Drones Road.

(AQW 4704/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is progressing plans for the provision of a 7 km stretch of dual carriageway on the A26, between Glarryford and the A44 Drones Road. This is one of the major projects included in the ten year Investment Delivery Plan for Roads.

In August 2008, I announced the preferred route which closely follows the existing corridor. The route is currently being taken through the final stage of the scheme assessment process. This will culminate in the publication of an Environmental Statement and draft Orders, for planning and land acquisition, which I would anticipate occurring in mid-2011.

It is anticipated that construction will commence in the latter part of the Investment Delivery Plan period.

Belfast to Derry Railway Line

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail a timescale for (i) relaying the Coleraine to Derry section of the Belfast to Derry railway line; (ii) the provision of a loop-line to facilitate an enhanced timetable; (iii) providing a new railway station at Waterside; and (iv) providing new trains to address issues of overcrowding.

(AQW 4764/10)

Minister for Regional Development:

- (i) Translink has already commenced detailed planning and design work for the re-lay of track between Coleraine and Derry. Work on the ground is scheduled to commence in April 2012 and will be completed in 2013 subject to normal approvals and procedures.
- (ii) In answer to points (ii) and (iv), included in the plans for the track re-lay work is the construction of a passing loop between Coleraine and Derry, which is a single line track. In addition, the Department has approved a project to purchase 20 new trains for use on the railways network. This will allow up to 3 additional trains to be deployed on the Derry line which should help to address the issues of overcrowding. The additional trains, coupled with the upgrade of the track and the new passing loop, will allow increased frequencies of services on the line.
- (iii) I am aware that Translink has been in consultation with ILEX on their plans to construct a foot and cycle bridge which could directly link the railway with Foyleside. At this time there are no funded plans available for the construction of a new railway station, however, I will consider any proposals brought forward in light of existing commitments, budget scenarios and long term plans being discussed with Translink. Currently Translink is working with ILEX to ensure that the bridge construction remains fully compatible with plans for a new station in the future if this is approved and proves financially feasible.

As part of a project to upgrade stations and halts across the railways network to comply with Disability Discrimination legislation and Translink's New Rail Vision, work has been completed to provide the existing station with tactile paving, improved lighting and signage, improved toilets and general painting. This was not a major work but cost some £300k.

Dual Carriageway Between Dundonald and Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to address the deterioration of the dual carriageway between Dundonald and Newtownards which is causing damage to vehicles.

(AQW 4860/10)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the A20 dual carriageway between Dundonald and Newtownards forms part of the Trunk Road network and funding for structural maintenance is sought through a separate bidding process to the normal allocation.

I am pleased to advise the Member that Roads Service has secured substantial funds under the Trunk Road bidding process for the 2010/11 financial year. Roads Service now plans to resurface several extensive sections of the A20 dual carriageway between Dundonald and Newtownards during the summer of this year.

I understand that in the period from 2002 to 2008 a series of sections of the Upper Newtownards Road were resurfaced between the Comber Road and Bradshaws Brae. The remaining sections of footway and carriageway along this route will be resurfaced on a priority basis, dependent upon condition and the availability of finance.

Roads Service staff will continue to monitor the condition of the carriageway and carry out interim repairs as required.

Department for Social Development

Goods and Services Paid for Online

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) which goods and services provided by her Department can be paid for online; (ii) the total number of transactions processed by her Department for these goods and services in each of the last five years; (iii) the total number of these transactions which were (a) online payments; (b) payments by cheque; (c) postal order; (d) cash; or

(e) other method; and (iv) the percentage of payments made online compared with other payment methods.

(AQW 4247/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie):

- (i) My Department is responsible for administering the game and game dealer licensing systems and for collecting fees in relation to various gambling licenses. No related goods or services provided can be paid for online.
- (ii) The total number of related transactions processed was:
- 2009 - 1613
- 2008 - 1712
- 2007 - 2055
- 2006 - 1867
- 2005 - 1827
- (iii) (a) No payments for these transactions were made on line. Details of the number of payments made by (b) cheque (c) postal order and (d) cash could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.
- (iv) Proportionate percentage of online payments relative to other methods – Nil.

Older People in Debt

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what information is available on the number of older people in debt; and how these figures have changed in the last three years.

(AQW 4280/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Households Below Average Income (HBAI) publication, which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), currently disseminates information on Pensioners, including information on a number of deprivation indicators, one of which is the numbers of pensioners behind in one or more household bill.

Approximately 4,100 pensioners in 2007/08 indicated they were behind in one or more household bills. This is an increase from approximately 2,800 in 2006/07 and 2,700 in 2005/06.

In 2007/08 30% of pensioners who indicated they were behind in 1 or more household bill were deemed to be in poverty (before housing costs). This figure has increased from 25% in 2006/07 and 10% in 2005/06.

In 2007/08 almost a third of those who indicated they were behind in one or more household bills fell at the bottom of the income scale. This figure has fluctuated over the last three years.

Funding for the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development why the Bloomfield estate in Bangor has never been considered for funding under (i) the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme; (ii) the Areas at Risk programme; and (iii) the Neighbourhood Renewal scheme.

(AQW 4285/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme was launched in April 2006 in response to need highlighted through the process of developing and implementing the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. A key principle which guided the selection of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas was that "They must be a workable size. The areas must be large enough to allow integrated measures to be developed and to prevent the resources that are available from being spread too thinly between too many Neighbourhoods". (People and Place: A Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, page 28).

The Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) Programme was developed to provide support to those isolated Enumeration Districts which were too small to be established as full Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. Since the Bloomfield estate was not within one of the most deprived districts, it was not eligible for support from the SPOD Programme.

In 2005, the geography for measuring relative deprivation in Northern Ireland changed from wards and Enumeration Districts to Super Output Areas (SOAs) and Output Areas (OAs). Since the population of OAs is very small, typically 200 people, the Department considers that they do not provide a reliable guide to the location of deprived communities and has decided that the SPOD programme should not normally be extended to isolated OAs. Although a small part of the Bloomfield estate (the Balloo Walk area off Ballyree Drive) falls within an OA in the most deprived 10%, it is too small for the whole estate to be designated as a SPOD area.

- (ii) The Bloomfield estate in Bangor has never been nominated for consideration under the Areas at Risk Pilot Programme. Potential areas for inclusion in this programme are sought from my Development Offices and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who have to provide an evidential basis for inclusion. There will be no further phases announced under this pilot programme.
- (iii) When the Neighborhood Renewal Strategy was launched, it targeted support to the most deprived urban communities. The target areas were based around as those urban wards within the most deprived 10% of wards in Northern Ireland as measured by the 'Noble' Multiple Deprivation Measures and those urban Enumeration Districts with the most deprived 10% of districts not already within one of the most deprived wards. The Bloomfield estate did not fall within one of the most deprived wards or Enumeration Districts and was therefore not eligible to be considered as a Neighbourhood Renewal Area.

Bloomfield Estate Community Worker

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans for the Bloomfield estate community worker when the current funding for the position runs out.
(AQW 4286/10)

Minister for Social Development: Plans for the Bloomfield estate community worker can not be outlined as the Housing Executive has just recently received a funding application from Bloomfield Residents Association for the Bloomfield estate community worker. This is currently being assessed.

Access to Mortgages

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to assist people in getting a mortgage, particularly in cases where they are able to provide substantial deposits.
(AQW 4318/10)

Minister for Social Development: Although my Department has had no dealings with the reserved matters relating to the regulation of financial institutions and markets in this regard, I can confirm that, with my officials, I have met on a number of occasions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders both to encourage responsible lending to homebuyers and to press lenders to ensure that affordable mortgage products are made available which help home buyers and which will, in turn, help the wider economy.

Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what funding she plans to commit to implement initiatives in the Ballymena town centre Masterplan in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12; and to outline the initiatives to which this funding will be directed.
(AQW 4402/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Ballymena masterplan sets out 46 actions which can be delivered over its projected timespan. Detailed budgets have not yet been set for 2010/11 and 2011/12.

Inquiry Into Town Centre Regeneration

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the recommendations in the inquiry into town centre regeneration which relate to Business Improvement Districts; and if she will act on these recommendations.

(AQW 4404/10)

Minister for Social Development: My Department fully supports the concept of statutory BIDs. DSD is continuing to work with the key stakeholders, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Finance and Personnel, to lay the groundwork for the progression of statutory BIDs.

Housing Benefit and Income Support Claims

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development why 'Good Cause' is sufficient support for Housing Benefit claims but insufficient for Income Support claims.

(AQW 4410/10)

Minister for Social Development: There are in fact "good cause" provisions in both Housing Benefit and Income Support. In Income Support where for example a person fails to attend a work focused interview he will not be penalised if he can show "good cause" for not attending the interview.

There is a difference, however, between the two benefits in the treatment of a late claim to the benefit. In relation to a claim for benefit, working age Housing Benefit can be backdated for six months if a claimant has "good cause" for not making the claim earlier. However, a claim for Income Support can be backdated for a lesser period (up to three months) and only if certain prescribed circumstances are met, for example, where the claimant was misinformed by the Department.

The reason for the different limits on backdating is that Housing Benefit is intended to meet very specific accommodation related costs and in some instances, unlike benefits designed to meet general living expenses, such as Income Support, customers may not make it their priority to claim straight away. In addition, those with chaotic lifestyles or in hard to reach vulnerable groups in particular, are less likely to engage with advice workers at an early stage, if at all, and that when they do substantial rent arrears could have been built up. This may lead to eviction and homelessness. Consequently, there is a longer backdating period for those claiming working age Housing Benefit.

Anti-social Behaviour

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many tenants have been evicted from (i) Housing Executive properties; and (ii) Housing Association properties, because of anti-social behaviour, broken down by local government district, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 4427/10)

Minister for Social Development: The tables below gives details of Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who have been evicted because of anti-social behaviour, broken down by district council area in each of the last five years.

TABLE 1:
HOUSING EXECUTIVE TENANTS EVICTED BECAUSE OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR.

Council Area	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Belfast	0	3	6	3	4
North Down	0	0	0	1	2
Ards	4	4	1	1	0
Castlereagh	1	0	0	0	1

Council Area	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Lisburn	5	4	3	3	7
Downpatrick	2	1	0	0	4
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	1	2	1	0	3
Armagh	0	2	1	0	1
Craigavon	1	3	1	3	2
Dungannon	2	2	2	3	0
Fermanagh	2	1	2	5	1
Ballymena	0	0	0	2	1
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	1	0	0	0	3
Carrickfergus	0	1	0	0	1
Larne	0	0	0	0	1
Ballycastle	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	2	0
Derry	4	1	0	3	3
Limavady	2	3	0	0	2
Magherafelt	0	2	0	0	2
Strabane	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0	5	2
Cookstown	1	0	0	2	3

TABLE 2:
HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS WHO HAVE BEEN EVICTED BECAUSE OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR.

Council Area	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Belfast	0	4	1	2	6
North Down	0	0	0	0	0
Ards	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0
Lisburn	0	0	0	0	1
Downpatrick	0	0	0	0	1
Banbridge	0	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0	1	0
Armagh	0	1	0	0	0
Craigavon	0	1	0	1	0
Dungannon	0	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	0	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	0	0	0
Antrim	0	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	0	0
Ballycastle	0	0	1	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	0	0
Derry	0	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0	0
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	1	0	0	0
Omagh	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	0	0	0	0	0

Housing in Upper Bann

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development how much her Department has invested in housing in (i) the Upper Bann constituency as a whole; (ii) Banbridge and the outlying areas; (iii) Lurgan and the outlying areas; and (iv) Portadown and the outlying areas, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 4460/10)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested. In relation to (i) the Housing Executive does not collate information about its maintenance and improvement

schemes by Parliamentary Constituency. However, Table 1 below details the Housing Association Grant approved for social housing for the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency in each of the last three years, based on the housing starts each year. In relation to (ii), (iii) and (iv) Table 2 below details the Housing Association Grant for social housing plus the value of the Housing Executive's maintenance and improvement schemes for the Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown District Office areas for each of the last three years.

TABLE 1: UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

Year	Housing Association Grant
2006/07	340,291
2007/08	3,536,894
2008/09	6,385,397

TABLE 2: HOUSING EXECUTIVE DISTRICT OFFICE

	Banbridge	Lurgan	Portadown
2006/2007	£3,715,732	£3,567,670	£1,369,123
2007/2008	£4,621,087	£5,650,303	£1,292,000
2008/2009	£2,606,608	£5,878,300	£989,000

Burst Pipes

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the total number of burst pipes reported by Housing Executive tenants since the start of December 2009; (ii) the total number of these incidents where serious damage was caused to property; (iii) the total cost of repairing these burst pipes; and (iv) the total cost of repairing the associated damage.

(AQW 4480/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive received reports of burst pipes to 2,011 properties since the start of December 2009 to 31 January 2010. The total number of incidents involving serious damage has yet to be determined but it is estimated that some 500 properties were affected. The total cost of repairing these burst pipes has not yet been finalised. However, to date £155,000 has been paid and it is estimated that approximately 25% of the works orders have yet to be settled. The total cost of repairing the associated damage has yet to be determined.

Winter Fuel Payment for Cancer Patients

Mr G Adams asked the Minister for Social Development if she has any plans to introduce a winter fuel payment for cancer patients living in fuel poverty.

(AQW 4483/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Winter Fuel Payment scheme provides help to those aged 60 and over. Older people are specifically targeted as they are acknowledged as being more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather during the winter months than other groups. Those people suffering from cancer or any other illness or disability who fall within this age group will benefit from the scheme. There are no plans at present to introduce a Winter Fuel Payment exclusively for cancer patients.

There is a range of social security benefits available to people suffering from illness or disability including Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance.

Creation of Footpaths in Housing Executive Areas

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if there is any funding available for joint schemes with the Department for Regional Development for the creation of footpaths in Housing Executive areas.

(AQW 4500/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive does not currently have any plans for joint schemes with the Department for Regional Development for the creation of footpaths in Housing Executive areas. The Department, through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, has facilitated the provision of environmental improvements, including footway upgrades, in Housing Executive estates in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas where this has been identified a priority within Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans

Queen's Quay Site, Belfast

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to list the companies that have (i) made formal bids to develop; or (ii) expressed an interest in developing the Queen's Quay site in Belfast since 2003.

(AQW 4528/10)

Minister for Social Development: Since 2003 the following companies have (i) made formal bids to develop the Queens Quay site: Sheridan Millennium; ADELA Properties LTD; BLOK Developments; The Carville Group; and Lagan Quays Ltd; (ii) my Department does not hold a record of any other company which has expressed an interest in developing the Queens Quay site since 2003.

Eviction Notices Issued in the Ards District

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many eviction notices were issued in the Ards District in each of the last five years; and how many of these did not result in an eviction.

(AQW 4538/10)

Minister for Social Development: The tables below provides details of Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants who were served with eviction notices in the Ards District in each of the last five years and the number of those that did not result in an eviction:-

TABLE 1: HOUSING EXECUTIVE TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	861	962	1,123	1,164	900
Did not result in eviction	841	943	1,111	1,154	886

TABLE 2: HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANTS

	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Notices served	1	3	2	3	1
Did not result in eviction	0	0	0	0	0

Eviction Notices

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many court issued eviction notices were administered by her Department, in each district, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 4540/10)

Minister for Social Development: I assume the Member is referring to Housing Executive districts. The position in each Housing Executive District Office area is detailed in the table below:-

District Office	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
East Belfast	4	3	1
West Belfast	1	2	5
North Belfast	6	2	5
Shankill	3	4	3
South Belfast	1	0	3
Bangor	0	6	4
Newtownards	1	1	2
Castlereagh	1	1	1
Lisburn	7	7	6
Dairy Farm	0	0	1
Downpatrick	4	0	4
Banbridge	0	0	3
Newry	0	1	2
Armagh	0	0	0
Lurgan	2	2	3
Portadown	1	0	0
Dungannon	0	3	0
Fermanagh	1	2	0
Ballymena	0	0	1
Antrim	0	1	3
Newtownabbey 1	0	3	3
Newtownabbey 2	0	5	2
Carrickfergus	6	2	5
Larne	2	0	0
Ballycastle	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	3
Waterloo Place	0	0	0
Waterside	0	0	2
Collon Terrace	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0
Magherafelt	1	0	0

District Office	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Strabane	0	0	0
Omagh	0	2	2
Cookstown	0	0	0

Funding for Community Workers in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact that the delay in certainty on the funding for community workers in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor is having on the area's wellbeing.

(AQW 4547/10)

Minister for Social Development: There has been no delay. The Department is currently assessing an application from the Kilcooley Community Forum for further funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund to cover the costs of a full time community worker and part time administrative officer. A decision made within the next few weeks.

Funding for Community Workers in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact that the delay in certainty on the funding for community workers in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor is having on the area's wellbeing.

(AQW 4548/10)

Minister for Social Development: I would refer the Member to the answer I gave recently to AQW 4286/10. The Housing Executive has just received a funding application from Bloomfield Residents Association for the Bloomfield estate community worker which is currently being assessed.

Housing Maintenance Schemes

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development which housing maintenance schemes will benefit from the £6 million investment announced on 21 January 2010 and the value of each scheme.

(AQW 4584/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details the schemes by type, name and estimated cost.

Scheme Type	Scheme Name	Estimated Cost (£)
External Cyclical Maintenance	Greystone Park, Mullaghmesh	151,000
	Drumleck	350,000
Revenue Replacement	Movilla Kitchens, Newtownards	283,000
	Shankill/ Wakehurst, Lurgan	407,000
	Markethill, Armagh	533,000
	Mossley Mallusk, Newtownabbey	634,000
	Suffolk Phase 2, Belfast	302,000
	Ballybone Phase 3, Belfast	316,000
	Jubilee Kitchens, Lisburn	100,000
	Bowtown 1988/89 Kitchens	122,000
	Fallowlea/ Millpath/ Desmond	278,000

Scheme Type	Scheme Name	Estimated Cost (£)
Heating	Newpark, Antrim	331,000
	Curryrierin Waterside, Derry	401,000
	Elmfield/ Manor/ Ligoniel, Belfast	706,000
	Flying Horse/ Model Farm	380,000
	Lisnaskea, Fermanagh	433,000
	Ardowen, Lurgan	465,000

Pension Credit

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development if the ownership of land or property, from which the owner derives no income or monies, affects a Pension Credit application.

(AQW 4630/10)

Minister for Social Development: Since Pension Credit is a means tested benefit, any property or land which a person owns may affect a claim for Pension Credit. The property that a person normally lives in is ignored for as long as they continue to live there. The value of other property or land (where it exceeds £10, 000) from which the owner derives no income will normally affect a claim.

Mortgage Rescue Scheme

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Social Development if she plans to make a bid in the next in-year monitoring round to fund the proposed mortgage rescue scheme.

(AQO 747/10)

Minister for Social Development: In the New Housing Agenda, which I launched in February 2008, I stated that I would develop proposals for a mortgage rescue scheme; this work was duly completed. I made an initial bid for funding in respect of a Mortgage Rescue Scheme of £5 million in the June 2008 monitoring round and have made bids at subsequent monitoring rounds to enable a scheme to be introduced. To date, none of those bids have been met. Unfortunately, therefore, I do not have the funding to allow me to launch the financial-rescue element of a mortgage scheme. I will not raise the expectations of people who are struggling to stay on the housing ladder when I simply do not have the budget to provide the kind of financial assistance that is required. However, I will continue to make bids in future monitoring rounds, to enable me to launch the financial-rescue element of the mortgage rescue scheme.

Although the final quarterly figures for last year have yet to be published it appears that the number of actions for repossession has almost doubled between 2007 and 2009; this indicates the need for a full rescue scheme.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Translation System for Irish

Mr B McElduff asked the Assembly Commission if he will introduce head-set equipment to facilitate a simultaneous translation system for Irish in the Assembly chamber for all members.

(AQW 4417/10)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): The Assembly Commission is currently considering the development of a language policy for the Northern Ireland Assembly and will consider translation services throughout the organisation as part of this work.

Revised Written Answers

Friday 19 February 2010

(AQW 4564/10)

Libraries NI's strategic review of the Greater Belfast library estate is focussed on making the best use of the available resources to improve the effectiveness of Public Library Services in the City rather than on generating substantial efficiency savings.

The proposals from the review are currently out for public consultation and the Libraries NI Board have made no final decisions regarding the closure of any library. Libraries NI have extended the consultation period by 1 month (to 5 April 2010) to allow as many people as possible to contribute. I would encourage everyone with an interest to take part in the ongoing consultation.

In the longer term there will be limited savings from reduced running costs (utilities and rates) and ultimately some income from the sale of some of the library buildings which are no longer required. Any resources saved from the closure of a public library will be reinvested in improving library services elsewhere.

Most of the efficiencies released however will not have monetary value. Rather the resources saved (such as staff time, public access computers and stock) will be redeployed to improve services elsewhere in Belfast.

Libraries NI have provided a summary of the resources which would be released if each of the libraries under review were to close (Annex A).

ANNEX A

SUMMARY OF RESOURCES USED BY EACH BRANCH LIBRARY NOT CONSIDERED VIABLE.

Branch	Annual running costs (£) (1)	Maintenance backlog (£) (2)	Staff hours per Week (3)	Number of Public Access computers (4)	If closed would site be sold? (5)
Andersonstown	11,807.67	34,635	67.00	4	A
Ballyhackamore	32,549.33	1,150	147.00	5	Yes
Ballymacarett	31,874.67	95,000	104.00	4	Yes
Belvoir	6,058.91	5,300	31.50	3	B
Braniel	4,905.79	28,250	35.00	3	B
Cloughfern	4,271.98	3,700	29.00	4	B
Dunmurry	2,109.86	6,450	28.00	3	B
Gilnahirk	3,906.54	22,300	30.00	2	B
Ligoniel	11,504.33	50,975	102.00	2	Yes

Branch	Annual running costs (£) (1)	Maintenance backlog (£) (2)	Staff hours per Week (3)	Number of Public Access computers (4)	If closed would site be sold? (5)
Oldpark	6,882.33	54,975	19.66	2	A
Sandy Row	16,704.00	7,410	11.08	2	No
Tullycarnet	35,854.55	19,610	181.75	20	Yes
Whitewell	3,603.00	8,875	10.00	2	B
Woodstock	32,693.33	5,770	163.00	5	Yes

- (1) Including utilities, rates, maintenance and allowance for management (EG deliveries), does not include staff costs.
- (2) Will not be required in the event of closure.
- (3) Will be used to improve opening hours in other libraries – no staff will lose their jobs.
- (4) Will be relocated to other libraries and made more available to the public.
- (5) A - major covenants in the lease affecting the value; B - part of public sector complex (Health/Education) - proceeds if sold determined by District Valuer.

(AQW 4575/10)

Since coming into office at the beginning of July 2009, I have given special attention to the development of a Minority Languages Strategy.

It is my intention to bring forward a draft strategy to the Executive by the end of March which can then go out to consultation.

One strand of this strategy will be to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language as set out in Section 15 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

The preparation of this draft Minority Languages Strategy will require engagement with, and commitments from, a number of other Northern Ireland Executive departments - especially in relation to education - and from the United Kingdom government in relation to broadcasting.

(AQW 4597/10)

Since coming into office at the beginning of July 2009, I have given special attention to the development of a Minority Languages Strategy.

It is my intention to bring forward a draft strategy to the Executive by the end of March which can then go out to consultation.

One strand of this strategy will be to enhance and develop the Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture as set out in Section 15 of the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006.

The preparation of this draft Minority Languages Strategy will require engagement with, and commitments from, a number of other Northern Ireland Executive departments - especially in relation to education - and from the United Kingdom government in relation to broadcasting.

Written Answers Inex

Department for Regional Development	184	Number of Students in Further and Higher Education	150
A6 Dungiven-Caw Dualling Project	191	People Aged 60 and Above Currently in a Further Education Course	146
A26 between Glarryford and the Drones Road	195	Preventative and Early Intervention Measures	146
Belfast to Derry Railway Line	196	Unemployment in the Kilcooley Estate	152
Bus Service from Limavady Town to Ballarena	192	Department for Social Development	197
Compensation for Falls on Defective Footpaths and Surfaces	193	Access to Mortgages	198
Compensation Paid as a Result of Defective Footpaths and Surfaces	195	Anti-social Behaviour	199
Dual Carriageway Between Dundonald and Newtownards	196	Ballymena Town Centre Masterplan	199
Easibus Service	190	Bloomfield Estate Community Worker	198
Eskra Community Association	185	Burst Pipes	202
Gritting Services	192	Creation of Footpaths in Housing Executive Areas	203
Handrail at Greystone Road, Limavady	193	Eviction Notices	203
iLink Card	184	Eviction Notices Issued in the Ards District	203
Laneways in Residential Areas	195	Funding for Community Workers in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor	205
New Footpaths	190	Funding for Community Workers in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor	205
NI Water	189	Funding for the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor	198
NI Water	189	Goods and Services Paid for Online	197
NI Water	190	Housing Benefit and Income Support Claims	199
NI Water	190	Housing in Upper Bann	201
NI Water	191	Housing Maintenance Schemes	205
NI Water	191	Inquiry Into Town Centre Regeneration	199
Resurfacing Work at Main Street, Greyabbey	193	Mortgage Rescue Scheme	206
Road and Footpath Infrastructure at Beverly Hills, Bangor	194	Older People in Debt	197
Road and Street Signs	185	Pension Credit	206
Road Salt	192	Queen's Quay Site, Belfast	203
Roads and Footpaths in the Bangor Area	194	Winter Fuel Payment for Cancer Patients	202
Roads and Footpaths in the Hollywood Area	194	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	102
Roads Service	186	Code of Practice Between UK Supermarkets and Producers	119
Rocks or Boulders on Grass Verges	191	December Fisheries Talks	103
Rocks or Boulders on Grass Verges	192	EU Fisheries Council	121
Tender Documents CO 71 and CO 58	194	Forestry Bill	121
Traffic Management System on the Knock Road	188	Forestry Production	121
Trees at Kingarve Road, Dungannon	185	Forest Service Land in Carrickfergus	120
Department for Employment and Learning	146	Grants to Assist the Farming Community	104
Essential Skills Courses	148	Loss of Local Potato Crop	122
Number of Enrolments in Further and Higher Education	149	Lost Crops	102
Number of Students in Further and Higher Education	146	Necarne Equestrian Centre	120
Number of Students in Further and Higher Education	149	Preventative and Early Intervention Measures	102
		Red Meat Promotional Week	119

Rural Development Programme	120	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	152
Rural Development Support Teams	119	Broadband for Rural Areas	155
Rural Support Team	104	Economically Inactive People	153
Tuberculosis	103	Invest NI	154
Tuberculosis	103	New Start-up Businesses	152
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	122	Offshore Renewable Energy	155
Arts Funding	130	Offshore Renewable Energy Certificate	155
Community Arts	126	Offshore Renewable Energy Forum	155
Community Arts	127	Orange Museums	154
Cultural Links with Scotland	129	Unemployed People with Disabilities	156
Fisheries (Amendment No. 2)		Department of Finance and Personnel	173
Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2004	125	BBC Spotlight programme	174
Irish Language Strategy	127	BBC Spotlight Programme	174
Irish Language Strategy	129	BBC Spotlight Programme	174
London 2012 Olympics	126	Dormant Bank Accounts	177
Milwaukee Irish Fest	128	Equal Pay Offer	175
Organisation of Large-scale Events	125	Rate Allowances	174
Projects in Upper Bann	122	Rate Arrears	175
Proposed Orange Museums	125	Rate Arrears	176
Sport and Physical Activity	128	Rate Collection Target	174
Strangford Lough	127	Rates Arrears	173
William Kennedy International		Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	177
Piping Festival	126	Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder	182
Department of Education	130	Blood Sugar Levels of Children	181
Bullying	134	Day Centres for People with a Learning Disability	182
Bullying	134	Dementia	181
Capital Building Projects	141	DHSSPS Budget	181
Capital Project for Bangor Grammar School	138	Diabetes	180
Capital Project for Schools in Holywood	138	Diabetes	181
Capital Projects	138	Efficiency Savings	183
Cheating in Exams	132	Fairtrade Products	177
Definition of Schools	140	Funding for Dementia Services	182
Detached Youth Provision	137	Health Debates	180
Detached Youth Provision in Belfast	136	Health of Residents of the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor	180
Educational Underachievement	135	Multiple Sclerosis	178
Former Faughan Valley School, Derry	130	Multiple Sclerosis	183
Former Faughan Valley School, Derry	133	Pay for Health Trust Chief Executives and Board Members	181
Governance Status of New Schools	141	Physiotherapists	178
Meetings with Counterparts in the Irish Republic	136	Physiotherapists	178
Number of Classrooms for New Build Schools	131	Private Medical Consultancy	180
Number of Schools	132	Provision of a Medical School in Derry	183
Proposed New Primary School in Islandmagee	140	Ravara House, Bangor	182
School Closures During the Recent Cold Spell	133	Recourse Issues for Nursing and Skills Mix Staff	179
Schools Funding	130	Royal Hospital Staff	179
Sparklebox Website	139	Stress-related Absenteeism among Royal Hospital Nursing Staff	179
Sparklebox Website	139	Swine Flu Vaccine	183
Sparklebox Website	140		
Transport to Schools Funding	141		

Termination of Pregnancy Guidelines	184
Department of the Environment	157
Access to Public Land for Horse-riders	171
Ards and Down Area Plan	170
Bridleways	171
Claims Made Against Local Councils for Damage to Vehicles	160
Claims Made Against Local Councils for Personal Injuries	161
Community Safety Grants	162
Council Minutes	168
Derelict Buildings in Towns and Villages	159
EU Nitrates Directive	157
EU Nitrates Directive	157
EU Nitrates Directive	158
George Best Belfast City Airport	172
George Best Belfast City Airport	172
George Best Belfast City Airport	172
George Best Belfast City Airport	173
Good Relations Remit	171
Grievances by Local Council Staff	162
Mourne Heritage Trust	169
Nitrates Directive Action Programme	171
Northern Ireland Environment Agency Education Sites	170
Northern Ireland Environment Agency Sites	170
Planning Appeals Commission	169
Planning Applications from Adam Armstrong	168
Planning Applications from Adam Armstrong	169
Publishing of Council Minutes Online	168
Walled City Signature Project	159
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	206
Translation System for Irish	206
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	101
BBC Spotlight Programme	101
British-Irish Council	101
Planning Appeals Commission	101
Presbyterian Mutual Society	102
Revised Written Answers	207



Published by Authority of the Northern Ireland Assembly,
Belfast: The Stationery Office

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Fax: 028 9023 5401

ISSN 1463-7162

Daily Editions: Single copies £5, Annual subscriptions £325

Bound Volumes of Debates are issued periodically during the session: Single copies: £90

Printed in Northern Ireland by The Stationery Office Limited

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ISBN 978-0-339-70160-1



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