
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 27 February 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Child Poverty

Mr P Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many children are deemed as living in child poverty, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 5066/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): There are three measures used – relative income poverty, absolute and mixed. Relative income poverty is the number of children living in households whose income is below 60% of the UK median income.

The number of children living in households experiencing relative income poverty 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07 by Parliamentary Constituency is set out in the table below.

Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	Confidence Interval
Belfast East	1,900	+/-114
Belfast North	5,700	+/-384
Belfast South	1,400	+/-63
Belfast West	7,700	+/-439
East Antrim	4,500	+/-272
East Londonderry	4,100	+/-272
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	7,600	+/-446
Foyle	10,100	+/-489
Lagan Valley	3,500	+/-130
Mid Ulster	9,300	+/-482
Newry and Armagh	7,100	+/-363
North Antrim	6,000	+/-291
North Down	5,100	+/-271
South Antrim	5,300	+/-241
South Down	8,800	+/-439
Strangford	5,900	+/-325
Upper Bann	6,400	+/-334
West Tyrone	3,200	+/-170
Total	103,700	+/-1,327

Source: Households Below Average Income, Ni 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07

Notes 1: As With Any Sample Survey There Is A Degree Of Error Attached To The Estimates. The Confidence Intervals For Each Constituency Represent The Range Within Which The 'True' Value Is Expected To Be. For Example, Applying The Confidence Intervals To The Estimate For Belfast East Would Indicate That The 'True' Child Poverty Estimate Lies Within The Range 1786 To 2014.

Notes 2: Figures In Italics Are Based On Small Sample Sizes And As Such ARE Subject To Relatively Large Levels Of Uncertainty And Should Be Treated With Caution

‘Lifetime Opportunities’

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the supporting actions and programmes to ensure the delivery of targets in Lifetime Opportunities will be published. (AQW 5125/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: As well as recently agreeing to adopt the broad architecture and principles of ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ as the basis of its strategy to tackle poverty and Social Inclusion here, the Executive also agreed to the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion.

It will be the responsibility of this Executive Sub-Committee to agree the priorities and key Executive actions for tackling poverty and social inclusion here and also to agree the monitoring and reporting mechanisms associated with the ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ Anti-Poverty Strategy.

We hope to convene the first meeting of the Executive Sub-Committee soon.

We can assure you that OFMDFM has been working, along with other Departments, on achieving the targets set out in the Programme for Government PSAs. A range of initiatives have been announced by the Executive aimed at alleviating poverty. Progress is monitored in accordance with Treasury guidance.

Child Poverty

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what adjustments are planned for child poverty programmes in light of the current economic difficulties. (AQO 2114/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Members will be aware of the wide range of initiatives announced by the Minister of Finance and Personnel on 15th December last year which were in direct response to the hardships being faced by families as a result of the global economic downturn.

Many of these measures, and in particular measures which will alleviate financial hardship for low income households such as the Fuel Credit Payment, the freeze on domestic rates and the deferral of water charges will all have a positive impact on poverty in general, including child poverty.

In addition, our introduction of the Financial Assistance Act has a direct relevance for poverty and social inclusion and affords the Executive the flexibility to address situations where existing arrangements are deemed either inadequate, ineffective, or in some other way unsatisfactory. Any proposals being advanced under the FAA would of course require full Executive endorsement.

The Executive’s adoption of the broad architecture and principles of ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ as the basis of its strategy to tackle poverty and Social Inclusion here, and its agreement to establish an Executive Sub-Committee on poverty and social inclusion re-affirms our commitment on meeting our PfG targets for child poverty.

The role of the Executive Sub-Committee will be to identify and agree key actions which will contribute most to achieving these targets and in identifying key actions the Sub-Committee will of course consider the impact that the current economic downturn may be having on existing poverty-related programmes including those targeting child poverty.

We fully recognise that the targets we have set ourselves, in respect of eliminating child poverty here, are extremely challenging particularly in light of this current economic downturn.

The Executive, however, remains totally committed to meeting the challenge and to working across government to ensure long-term sustainable progress.

The comprehensive Child Poverty Inquiry report and recommendations produced by the OFMDFM Committee provides a useful platform for further work as will the establishment of a cross Departmental sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People, which has been tasked with ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive focus on the issue of child poverty here.

Programme for Government

Mr C Boylan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the implications for the Programme for Government on the decision by the Minister of the Environment to ban the advertising campaign on energy efficiency. (AQO 2115/09)

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

It is not possible to measure the specific impact of the absence of this particular campaign on the Programme for Government but we remain committed to meeting our PfG targets.

LifeTime Opportunities

Mrs C Hanna asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if LifeTime Opportunities is now government policy. (AQO 2117/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In line with its statutory obligation under Section 28E of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 the Executive agreed, on 20 November 2008, to formally adopt the broad architecture and principles of 'Lifetime Opportunities' as the basis of its strategy to tackle poverty and Social Inclusion and patterns of deprivation, based on social need including:

- its two stated overall objectives;
- its stated goals for each of the four life cycle groups;
- re-convening the Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum as one of a range of monitoring mechanisms to gauge progress.

The Executive further agreed to the establishment of an Executive Sub-Committee on poverty and social inclusion, chaired by us, whose task it will be to identify and agree a number of key actions which would contribute most to achieving the goals set out in Lifetime Opportunities and which would be at the core of the Executive's Strategy.

The Programme for Government restates the overall objectives of Lifetime Opportunities as part of its commitment to tackle poverty and disadvantage.

As a broad framework, Lifetime Opportunities provides the strategic goals and targets. The Executive will need to decide the actions needed to deliver on these.

It is hoped to convene the first meeting of both the Executive Sub-Committee and the re-established Stakeholder Forum early this year.

Child Poverty

Mr A McFarland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the current economic downturn, whether the Programme for Government target of halving child poverty by 2010 will be met. (AQO 2118/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The number of children living in relative income poverty has fallen by 39,000 since 1998/99; in 1998/99 it was estimated to be 135,000 (29% of all children); the most recent estimate for 2006/07 was 96,000 (22% of all children).

The number of children living in absolute income poverty has fallen by 82,000 since 1998/99. Then it was estimated to be 135,000, with the most recent estimate for 2006/07 being 52,600 (12% of all children).

The number of children living in material deprivation and relative income poverty combined has fallen by 12,600 since 2004/05. In 2004/05 it was estimated to be 89,100 (21% of all children). The most recent estimate for 2006/07 was 76,500 (18% of all children).

Whilst these figures reflect that progress is being made we fully recognise that the targets we have set ourselves in respect of eliminating child poverty are extremely challenging, particularly in light of the current economic downturn.

The Executive, however, remains totally committed to meeting this challenge by working across government to ensure long-term sustainable progress.

Our commitment has recently been restated in our decision to adopt the broad architecture and principles of ‘Lifetime Opportunities’ and also in our introduction of the Financial Assistance Act which may be utilised to address situations where existing arrangements are either inadequate, ineffective or in some other way unsatisfactory.

The comprehensive Child Poverty Inquiry report and recommendations produced by the OFMDFM Committee provides a useful platform for further work as will the establishment of a cross Departmental sub-group of the Ministerial Sub Committee for Children and Young People, which has been tasked with ensuring a comprehensive and cohesive focus on the issue of child poverty here.

Victims’ Groups

Mr D Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process by which it engages with victims’ groups. (AQO 2119/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Victims Unit is a dedicated unit in OFMDFM dealing with victims and survivors issues.

The unit provides a point of contact for groups to liaise with the Department regarding matters directly related to the victims and survivors sector. This includes matters relating to funding and dissemination of information regarding wider government policy of interest to the sector.

International Relations Strategy

Mr J Craig asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it expects to bring forward an International Relations Strategy. (AQO 2120/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is currently drafting an International Relations Strategy and, following consultation with Departments and the OFMDFM Committee, we hope to bring this to the Executive by the Summer 2009.

Child Poverty

Mr J McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the provisions of the Financial Assistance Act will be employed to address child poverty. (AQO 2121/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: You will be familiar with the recent debates around the Financial Assistance Act and the uses specified in the legislation.

Section 1 of the Act is for use in exceptional circumstances.

Under Section 2, however, there is provision for the Act to be utilised to bring forward schemes to tackle poverty and social exclusion where existing arrangements are either ineffective, inadequate or in some other way unsatisfactory.

We would wish to emphasise that any determination under Section 2 would require a detailed assessment before any scheme could or would be brought before the Executive.

Meetings about Victims of the Troubles

Mr M Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how it processes requests from members of the public for meetings about victims of the Troubles. (AQO 2123/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: All requests for meetings with members of the public are processed by Private Office staff liaising with officials in Victims Unit.

Advice is sought from, and provided by, Victims Unit.

Executive Committee

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what mechanisms exist for a Minister to register dissent to decisions taken by a majority of Executive Ministers. (AQO 2125/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In accordance with Section 28A (8) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, it is the duty of the Chairmen of the Executive Committee to seek to secure that decisions of the Executive Committee are reached by consensus wherever possible. If that consensus cannot be reached, a vote may be taken.

Ministers can therefore vote against the matter being proposed and will be recorded as having done so.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Pig Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much compensation has been given to the pig industry because of the dioxin scare. (AQW 5053/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): On the 12th February the Executive agreed to increase the total budget for Cull, Disposal and Hardship Payment Schemes for producers and processors in the pork and beef sectors to £9.6m. Approximately £4.2m will be for pigmeat processors to provide hardship payments relating to the direct losses associated with removal of product from the food chain.

The total Executive budget also covers the costs of a disposal scheme for pigmeat product suspected of being affected by the contamination.

However EC State Aid approval is required and is currently urgently being sought, before any money can be paid to those affected. My Department is working closely with DETI, who lead in support of the processing sector, to secure the necessary EC approvals.

I was also successful in getting EC approval, on 18th December 2008, for a Private Storage Aid scheme for pigmeat introduced here. Although uptake has been slow the industry has indicated that it wishes the scheme to remain open to enable them to derive maximum benefit over the longer term. This scheme is valued at some £6m.

European Fisheries Council

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact of the European Fisheries Council decision to reduce the number of days at sea by 25%. (AQW 5080/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Annex 11a of the new TAC and Quota regulation EC 43/2009 sets out the Maximum Allowable Effort (MAE) in kilowatt days available for the fishing fleet by sea area. This is a new arrangement that was introduced through the new Cod Recovery Regulation agreed by Europe in November. The effort available for 2009 is the average effort deployed by fishing vessels from 2004-2006 less 25%. This does not necessarily mean that vessels Days at Sea allocations will be reduced by 25% this year, as allocations at vessel level are now a matter for the Member State.

We are currently discussing with our industry and the other Fisheries Administrations what arrangements are appropriate for the Irish Sea. Our aim is to maximise flexibilities under the Recovery Plan that will permit additional effort to be awarded in return for measures that reduce cod mortality. A satisfactory arrangement must also take account of the recent fishing patterns by our fleet.

I estimate that up to three quarters of the Nephrops fleet could suffer no cuts in Days at Sea provided that they agree to a plan not to catch more than 5% cod. Other vessels will be able to earn more fishing days if they adopt more selective gear or agree to avoid areas where cod aggregate in the spring.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in relation to the Countryside Management Scheme to detail (i) the number of applications that have been received since its inception; (ii) how many application were accepted and in what constituency areas; (iii) the average size of the farms of successful applicants; and (iv) plans are there to extend the scheme. (AQW 5122/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) The number of applications to the new Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) in 2008 was 4500.
- (ii) Up to 1300 applications have been progressed with a farm visit to allow agreements to be drawn up by DARD. Not until these agreements have been agreed to by the applicant has the applicant entered into the scheme. I anticipate that up to 1300 agreements will be signed soon.
- (iii) I am unable to provide you with information on farm size as no applications have as yet been accepted into the Scheme.
- (iv) The Scheme will reopen to applications in Summer 2009.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the £6.5m expenditure required by AFBI, in this financial year. (AQW 5144/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: AFBI earns over £9m a year from non-DARD clients, and the subsequent cash receipts form an important part of the organisation's cash flow. As is customary in business relationships there is a delay between the point at which AFBI earns income and when it receives the cash.

This bid is to cover the shortfall between the cash AFBI needs to pay its operating expenses, and the cash it expects to receive, for the remainder of this financial year. AFBI has confirmed that in accruals terms, it will balance its Budget, this financial year.

	£m
Forecast Cash requirements – staff costs	4.3
Forecast Cash requirements – other creditors	5.7
Forecast cash available	3.5
Net cash requirement	6.5

Young Entrants Scheme

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to reinstate the Young Entrants Scheme for farmers. (AQW 5145/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The current New Entrants Scheme which was suspended to new applications in July 2008 will permanently close to applications at the end of February 2009.

An in-depth assessment is underway to evaluate the impact and cost effectiveness of the Scheme. A decision on the way ahead will be reached after that evaluation concludes.

Woodland Cover

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she plans to increase woodland cover; and if so, what areas are being considered. (AQW 5219/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department plans to increase woodland cover by 1,650 hectares over the next three years, as identified in the Executive Programme for Government 2008-2011 and the Forestry Strategy.

There are challenges in meeting this target, not least the current economic outlook and the strong commitment of landowners to continue farming.

We are therefore progressing a number of initiatives to encourage all landowners to consider woodland as an alternative land use. These include:

- Seeking to amend the current Farm Woodland Premium Scheme so that more farmers can access its annual payments.
- Greater emphasis on the promotion and marketing of all forestry grant schemes
- Identifying barriers to increasing woodland cover and how they can be overcome.

Forest Service will continue to provide grant aid and advice to landowners through its forestry grant schemes, supported by funds made available under the NI Rural Development Programme.

It is envisaged that much of the increase in woodland cover will be achieved through the first afforestation of privately owned agricultural land. Planting will take place on suitable sites and will have regard for the environmental value of each site in terms of existing habitats, landscape value, archaeological and historic features. The Forest Service has published an indicative map on its website (www.forestserviceni.gov.uk) which shows where new woodland is to be encouraged.

Rural Public Transport Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions there have been between her Department and the Department for Regional Development to protect rural public transport services. (AQW 5261/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Rural public transport is a crucial issue for many people living in rural areas and I have identified it as one of five priorities in my Department's draft Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework which is currently out to public consultation.

My Department has been working with the Department for Regional Development on the development of this framework by seeking to identify and deal with gaps in the provision of transport and barriers to accessing rural transport.

My Department will continue to work with the Department for Regional Development to ensure a joined up approach to rural transport provision and I also intend to explore the opportunities for improving rural transport as part of the development of the Rural White Paper.

Broadband for Farmers

Mrs C McGill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants are available to install broadband for those farmers wishing to modernise their farms. (AQW 5371/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There are no grants available with the installation of broadband for farmers wishing to modernise their farms. The provision of broadband services to rural communities and rural businesses is an important issue and I have written to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Industry, who has responsibility for telecommunications, about the provision of broadband in rural areas.

The EU Commission have recently proposed an EU economic recovery plan which includes funding for rural broadband under rural development programmes. However the amount of money available to the North under this plan is likely to be small and at present there is considerable doubt as to whether it will be agreed by Member States.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a detailed breakdown of how much has been spent by her Department on the administration of the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5394/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date £289,000 has been spent on staff time; £30,000 on the independent economic appraisal and £24,000 on printing information packs and advertising.

Rural Businesses

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farm and rural businesses to which her Department has offered support and the amount in each case, in the West Tyrone constituency, in the last three years. (AQW 5398/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The information is not held in the form requested and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Details of subsidy/grant payments by recipient by European financial year to October 2007 are published on the Department's website. The Department recognises the interest shown by Members in having better information on the level of payments by area. It will arrange to collate the information on CAP, Rural Development and other grant payments for the EAGF year October 07/08, by postcode prefix level and will make that available in the Assembly Library by no later than the end of March.

Farm Diversification Projects

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm diversification projects has her Department supported, in the West Tyrone constituency, in the last three years. (AQW 5399/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under the 2001 -2006 programme which continued to fund projects through 2008 there was no specific 'Farm Diversification' measure. It is therefore not possible to provide details of farm diversification projects supported on the West Tyrone constituency during this period.

Under Axis 3 of the new Rural Development Programme the ring fenced support for farm diversification at £20m will be almost equal to the £21m budget for the whole of the previous LEADER+ Programme. The North West Cluster area in which the West Tyrone constituency is located has secured a rural development budget of just over £18 million and will be agreeing their apportionments for each measure, including farm diversification, with the Department in the coming weeks.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many of her staff are working on the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5429/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: An equivalent of 5.65 full-time staff have worked on the development of the Farm Modernisation Programme since April 2007. This figure is broken down by work area as follows:

Work Area	Number of staff (equivalent full time staff years).
Top Management Group	0.1
Policy	0.13
Programme Development/ Implementation	3.53
Technical Support	0.81
DARD offices	1.08

The figure for the DARD offices includes the 24 administrative support staff responsible for receipting applications and those members of staff that assisted in managing the queues on the opening day of the Farm Modernisation Programme.

Review on Crossnacreevy

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on what date was a review initiated on Crossnacreevy; and when are the recommendations expected. (AQW 5472/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A review to consider the potential relocation of services at the Plant Testing Station, Crossnacreevy, commenced in July 2007.

As part of the review a business case was developed and it is in the final stage of quality assurance. Recommendations from the business case are expected by the end of March 2009.

Bee Keeping Industry

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the current state of the Bee Keeping Industry. (AQW 5515/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: It is estimated that there are currently 1,000 beekeepers, maintaining about 4,000 hives here. Following winter losses of typically 10 – 25% bee numbers normally fall in spring and then come back up again in May or June. However at this stage in the year it is too early to estimate what level of natural winter losses have occurred, though they are expected to be higher this year due to the extreme cold.

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

Bee Health Strategy

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an update on her local Bee Health Strategy as promised at the European Conference of Apidology (EurBee3) held on 9 September 2008. (AQW 5516/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I had indicated at the EurBee3 Conference on the 9 September 2008, my intention to commission work on a Bee Health Strategy for the north of Ireland. However since then, the National Audit Office (NAO), has undertaken a review of the Bee Health Programme in England and Wales, and work on the Defra Strategy has been suspended awaiting the outcome of this Report. In the circumstances I feel it would also be appropriate to await the outcome of this Review in order to take on board any appropriate recommendations, before proceeding with our Strategy. It is envisaged that the Report will be published in the next few weeks and work on the local strategy will then be taken forward.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide an update on the negotiations with the European Commission about the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5617/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Senior DARD officials met with the European Commission on 19th February to clarify issues and are actively pursuing a number of options that would enable the scheme to proceed. A further meeting with the European Commission is planned for week commencing 2nd March.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Former Army Barracks at Ballykelly

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any plans for developing the former army barracks at Ballykelly as a centre for sports, leisure and recreation. (AQW 4690/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): I have not been approached regarding a centre for sports at the former army barracks at Ballykelly. However I would be happy to consider any practical proposals for redeveloping the site as a centre for sports, leisure and recreation that would be consistent with the aims and objectives of the Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation for Northern Ireland.

Tyrone GAA

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the names of his Executive colleagues that received invitations to attend his reception at Parliament Buildings on Friday 6 February 2009, in honour of the Tyrone teams that won the 2008 Senior and Minor All Ireland Football Championships. (AQW 4978/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Invitations to the Tyrone GAA reception held in Parliament Buildings on Friday 6 February 2009 were not extended to any members of the Executive. However, in keeping with usual practice, CAL Committee members were invited to the event in the Great Hall. Invitations were issued to the following:

Barry McElduff MLA
David McNarry MLA
Dominic Bradley MLA
Francie Brolly MLA
Lord Browne MLA
Kieran McCarthy MLA
Nelson McCausland MLA
Raymond McCartney MLA
Pat Ramsey MLA
Ken Robinson MLA
Jim Shannon MLA

Investment in Sports Stadiums

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will undertake a full green book cost benefit analysis of any investment in (i) Windsor Park; (ii) Casement Park; or (iii) Ravenhill rugby ground. (AQW 4994/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for analysing the cost benefits of any investment in (i) Windsor Park; (ii) Casement Park or (iii) Ravenhill rugby ground rests with the owners and operators of the venues, namely Linfield Football Club/the Irish Football Association (IFA), the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) respectively.

Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), however, is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. SNI runs a number of exchequer investment programmes that are designed to assist owners and operators of sports grounds improve facilities at their venues. All applications for support under these programmes are subject to full green book cost benefit analysis.

SNI has recently commissioned, on behalf of the IFA and Linfield Football Club, a green book economic appraisal to analyse the cost benefits of a short term investment in Windsor Park to address urgent spectator safety issues at the ground and to enable international football to continue to be played there on an interim basis pending consideration of the longer term provision for international soccer. Work on this appraisal is on-going.

In 2004 and 2007 the GAA completed full green book economic appraisals for the provision of floodlighting and spectator safety improvements respectively at Casement Park. In 2004 and 2008 the IRFU also completed full green book economic appraisals for the upgrading of office accommodation and spectator safety improvements respectively at Ravenhill Rugby ground. On the basis of these, SNI has to date approved investment proposals from the GAA to the value of £1.1m for Casement Park and from the IRFU to the value of £1.09m for Ravenhill Rugby Ground under previous and existing exchequer grant-aid programmes.

Tyrone GAA

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the names of those Assembly Members that received invitations to attend his reception at Parliament Buildings on Friday 6 February 2009, in honour of the Tyrone teams that won the 2008 Senior and Minor All-Ireland Football Championships. (AQW 4995/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Invitations to the Tyrone GAA reception held in Parliament Buildings on Friday 6 February 2009 were not extended to any members of the Executive. However, in keeping with usual practice, CAL Committee members were invited to the event in the Great Hall. Invitations were issued to the following:

Barry McElduff MLA
 David McNarry MLA
 Dominic Bradley MLA
 Francie Brolly MLA
 Lord Browne MLA
 Kieran McCarthy MLA
 Nelson McCausland MLA
 Raymond McCartney MLA
 Pat Ramsey MLA
 Ken Robinson MLA
 Jim Shannon MLA

Cultural Events and Festivals

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding his Department has provided for cultural events and festivals in the North Down constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 5129/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Detail of funding, awarded for cultural events and festivals, in the North Down area, is set out in the attached table.

Year	Amount (£)
08/09	514, 515
07/08	25, 439
06/07	57, 175
Total	597, 129

Special Olympics

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding has been allocated for those involved in the special olympics. (AQW 5146/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: On Thursday 4th September 2008 I attended a presentation by Special Olympics Ireland on Special Olympics Ulster Operational Plan for 2008 -2011, along with Gerry Kelly MLA, Caitriona Ruane MLA and Linda Browne who represented Michael McGimpsey MLA. Although invited, Margaret Ritchie MLA was unable to attend

After the presentation it was agreed that we would give consideration to (i) supporting Special Olympics Ulster proposals, (ii) which Department should take lead responsibility for working with and funding Special Olympics Ulster given the number of Departments that will benefit from their activities.

I wrote to all the Ministers involved on 18th December 2008 proposing that with their agreement, my Department would assume the lead role and that if they were content in principle, subject to an approved business case, they make a contribution to the costs involved to provide the necessary support to Special Olympics Ulster.

I will be considering the matter further when I receive responses from the respective Ministers.

Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for the cost of, and when construction will begin on, the new visitors centre at the Ulster American Folk Park in Omagh. (AQW 5156/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department is awaiting a business case / feasibility study from National Museums Northern Ireland for the visitor centre at the Ulster American Folk Park. Currently the estimated cost is in the region of £10m. Subject to funding being available and approval of the business case National Museums would hope to be in a position to commence construction in 2010/11.

Promotion of Cultures

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what areas of (i) English; (ii) Welsh; or (iii) Scottish culture are promoted by his Department. (AQW 5171/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The promotion of English, Welsh and Scottish culture is the responsibility of the respective administrations of those regions. The primary role of my Department is to provide the strategic leadership and resources for the promotion and sustainable development of the culture, arts and leisure sectors in Northern Ireland.

Aspects of English, Welsh and Scottish culture are however also promoted through the work of DCAL and its arms length bodies. Some examples of this are as follows:

- work with the Scottish Executive and counterparts in the Irish Republic in the establishment and funding of the 'Colmcille' organisation. This organisation aims to foster support for the Gaelic language and develop links between Gaelic Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic;
- many aspects of English, Welsh and Scottish culture, history, literature, geography and society are reflected in the stocks of material held in public libraries in Northern Ireland;
- National Museums' collections contain a range of objects of English, Welsh and Scottish provenance across a range of subject areas including Archaeology, Art and the Natural Science. These objects are presented and interpreted in local, national and international contexts; and
- the Arts Council has awarded over £650,000 for Ulster-Scots related projects since 1 April 2004. Organisations funded include Scottish / Highland country dancing groups and pipe bands.

Creative Youth Partnerships

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the work of Creative Youth Partnerships; and whether his Department will consider ring-fencing their budget. (AQW 5199/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of the work of Creative Youth Partnerships, which seeks to promote the participation of children and young people in artistic and creative activities and contribute to the professional development and employment opportunities of artists.

Creative Youth Partnerships provides a valuable service to children and young people in formal and non-formal education settings and community and voluntary groups. By introducing children and young people to the arts and creative activity, CYP can also help to open up the potential for career paths into the creative industries.

A recent evaluation, which sought feedback from schools that have participated in the programme, has been very positive and indicates that Creative Youth Partnerships is making a significant contribution to the artistic and creative development of our young people.

The Creative Youth Partnerships Steering Group has produced a business plan to take the initiative forward, which is currently being considered by my officials and colleagues in the Department of Education. This is

taking place in the context of the major structural changes occurring in the education sector and this process will inform the future funding of Creative Youth Partnerships.

Football Offences

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in the absence of legislation, what guidelines his Department will bring forward relating to football offences. (AQW 5349/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The introduction of legislation and guidelines relating to football offences is a reserved matter and therefore the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). The NIO, however, in consultation with officials in my Department, has been working on the development of a public consultation paper on this matter as a first step to introducing appropriate legislation through Westminster. I have also recently met with Paul Goggins MP, the NIO Criminal Justice Minister, to encourage him to publish proposals for consultation as soon as possible.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number and percentage of employees in his Department who have disabilities. (AQW 5375/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Information on the number of staff who have disabilities is collected for equality monitoring purposes by the Department of Finance and Personnel, on behalf of all NICS Departments.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will therefore be responding on behalf of all Departments.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide a breakdown of all costs incurred by his Department in the preparation of the bid for the World Police and Fire Games, including consultancy and travel costs. (AQW 5440/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL through the Northern Ireland Events Company contributed £32,587.38 towards the costs of securing the WPFPG in 2013. In addition £4414.29 was spent on travel and subsistence for Mr Edgar Jardine, Grade 3 NICS, and Mr Jasper Perry, Senior Events Manager NIEC.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to confirm (i) which officials travelled to Australia; (ii) their grade in the Department; and (iii) the cost that was incurred, in relation to the bid for the World Police and Fire Games. (AQW 5442/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL through the Northern Ireland Events Company contributed £32,587.38 towards the costs of securing the WPFPG in 2013. In addition £4414.29 was spent on travel and subsistence for Mr Edgar Jardine, Grade 3 NICS, and Mr Jasper Perry, Senior Events Manager NIEC.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which organisations and individuals were consulted during the preparation of the bid for the World Police and Fire Games. (AQW 5444/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The lead organisation in preparing the bid for the World Police and Fire Games was the RUC Athletic Association in conjunction with the PSNI.

My Department was one of the organisations that were consulted and assisted with the preparation of the bid and did not have responsibility for consulting with any other organisation or for developing the processes.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what process was followed in selecting the individual and/or organisation responsible for the preparation of the bid for the World Police and Fire Games. (AQW 5446/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The lead organisation in preparing the bid for the World Police and Fire Games was the RUC Athletic Association in conjunction with the PSNI.

My Department was one of the organisations that were consulted and assisted with the preparation of the bid and did not have responsibility for consulting with any other organisation or for developing the processes.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to the World Police and Fire Games, (i) to list the appointments of chairman and members of the managements committee and the extent of the involvement of his Department in this decision; (ii) what the remuneration is for these posts; and (iii) if the Nolan Principles apply to these appointments. (AQW 5453/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is currently an interim Stakeholder Group, comprising representatives of my Department, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Belfast City Council and Sport Northern Ireland, managing the immediate work required for delivering the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

The Stakeholder Group have appointed BDO Stoy Hayward to prepare a business case which will include a recommendation on a delivery mechanism for the games, the cost of the games and potential sources of funding. Once the cost of the games has been finalised, decisions will be taken on how the funding package will be assembled.

Any recruitment of staff and any external appointments will be made in accordance with current legislation and best practice.

All procurement will follow the well established best practice procedures.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure who prepared the bid for the World Police and Fire Games. (AQW 5454/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The bid which was successful in securing the World Police and Fire Games for Belfast in 2013 was led by the RUC Athletic Association in conjunction with the PSNI and supported by Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, the Northern Ireland Events Company and DCAL

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if staff will be recruited to assist with the arrangements for the World Police and Fire Games; and how will the staff be appointed. (AQW 5455/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is currently an interim Stakeholder Group, comprising representatives of my Department, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Belfast City Council and Sport Northern Ireland, managing the immediate work required for delivering the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

The Stakeholder Group have appointed BDO Stoy Hayward to prepare a business case which will include a recommendation on a delivery mechanism for the games, the cost of the games and potential sources of funding. Once the cost of the games has been finalised, decisions will be taken on how the funding package will be assembled.

Any recruitment of staff and any external appointments will be made in accordance with current legislation and best practice.

All procurement will follow the well established best practice procedures.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if public procurement principles will be applied in relation to the purchase of goods and services required for the World Police and Fire Games.

(AQW 5456/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is currently an interim Stakeholder Group, comprising representatives of my Department, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Belfast City Council and Sport Northern Ireland, managing the immediate work required for delivering the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

The Stakeholder Group have appointed BDO Stoy Hayward to prepare a business case which will include a recommendation on a delivery mechanism for the games, the cost of the games and potential sources of funding. Once the cost of the games has been finalised, decisions will be taken on how the funding package will be assembled.

Any recruitment of staff and any external appointments will be made in accordance with current legislation and best practice.

All procurement will follow the well established best practice procedures.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to the World Police and Fire Games, what is the estimated total cost of hosting the games; and how much will be funded by (i) his Department; (ii) the public sector; and (iii) the private sector.

(AQW 5457/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is currently an interim Stakeholder Group, comprising representatives of my Department, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, Belfast City Council and Sport Northern Ireland, managing the immediate work required for delivering the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.

The Stakeholder Group have appointed BDO Stoy Hayward to prepare a business case which will include a recommendation on a delivery mechanism for the games, the cost of the games and potential sources of funding. Once the cost of the games has been finalised, decisions will be taken on how the funding package will be assembled.

Any recruitment of staff and any external appointments will be made in accordance with current legislation and best practice.

All procurement will follow the well established best practice procedures.

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many Civil Service employees there are in his Department in Derry/Londonderry.

(AQW 5522/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Within my Department there are no Civil Service employees based in Londonderry.

Missing Library Books

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action he is taking to tackle the £566,000 lost through missing library books across all the Education and Library Boards, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5557/09)

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

The Boards have a range of measures in place to reduce stock losses. These include a system which prevents users who have not returned library books from borrowing additional books or from using library computers.

These measures will remain in place when the Northern Ireland Library Authority (NILA) becomes operational on 1 April 2009. NILA will eventually be able to operate the measures on a regional basis.

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

Stadia Safety

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to stadia safety, (i) how much his Department has spent in the last two years; (ii) how much has been spent in this financial year; and (iii) where has the money been spent in each year. (AQW 5558/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. In the last two financial years SNI has spent a total of £3,048,119 on safety improvements at sports grounds. To date in this financial year, SNI has released a further £1,733,081 for this purpose. This funding was paid to the following venues in each year:

Applicant	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09 to date
Ballymena United FC	£117,873	£27,599	£16,164
Down GAA	£638,959	£161,041	
Tyrone GAA	£419,639	£194,131	
Armagh GAA		£254,952	£492,672
Cliftonville FC		£412,253	£307,747
Fermanagh GAA		£405,123	
Portadown FC		£416,549	£371,620
Antrim GAA			£218,538
Derry GAA			£326,340
Totals	£1,176,471	£1,871,648	£1,733,081

Football Grounds Stewards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the new legislation for football grounds stewards will be introduced; and what extra powers stewards will have. (AQW 5587/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 will introduce into Northern Ireland a safety certification scheme for larger sports grounds including larger football grounds. It is anticipated that the safety certificates will incorporate requirements for ground stewards. Whilst it is expected that stewards will not have extra powers, safety certificates will impose conditions for the management of stewards by venue owners including training, status, conduct, etc. It is currently expected that DCAL will complete the legislative process to introduce the safety certification scheme in the 2009 calendar year. This timetable will be subject to the completion of the normal statutory processes.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

East Belfast Primary Schools

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the levels of finance allocated as ring-fenced during the years (a) 2007/08; (b) 2006/07; and (c) 2005/06, to East Belfast primary schools; and (ii) the amount underspent and returned to her Department. (AQW 3471/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): The table below provides details of the ring-fenced amounts which have been allocated to East Belfast primary schools and managed by Boards during each year; the amount unspent at the year end; and the amount returned to the Department for 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08.

	2005-06 (£000's)	2006-07 (£000's)	2007-08 (£000's)
Ring-fenced Funding	1,423	1,187	1,216
Amount under spent /(overspent)	(49)	171	73

The above figures do not include ring-fenced allocations that are directly delegated from the Department to schools, with the exception of extended schools funding, as a supplement to the funding determined under the Common Funding Formula. It is therefore not possible, nor practical, to trace every individual ring-fenced fund but to ensure the services for which the funding was allocated are delivered.

Tá gach cistiú a leithroinneadh ar scoileanna agus nach raibh caite ag deireadh na bliana airgeadais, tá sé ar fáil do scoileanna le húsáid sna blianta atá le teacht ar an chuspóir dá raibh sé beartaithe é a úsáid agus ní choinníonn an Roinn an cistiú.

All funding allocated to schools and unspent at the end of the financial year is available for schools to use in future years for the purposes it was intended and is not retained by the Department.

Sick Leave for Teaching Staff

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Education what method the five Education and Library Boards use to monitor and control sick leave for teaching staff. (AQW 4085/09)

Minister of Education: A revised Teacher Attendance Procedure was agreed between the Department, the employers and the teachers' unions and issued to schools in April 2008. (http://www.deni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_tnc_2008-2_-_teacher_attendance_procedure_final_version.pdf)

The Department provides annual information on individual school absence levels to the Education and Library Boards; the Boards then use this information to identify schools with high absence levels and investigate action taken by such schools.

In accordance with the Teacher Attendance Procedure, the Boards also:

- provide information and advice to Principals;
- advise and support Governors and Principals in managing teacher welfare and attendance;
- facilitate the medical referral process;
- advise the Principal on rehabilitation, risk assessments and reasonable adjustments;
- promote the implementation of the Teacher Attendance Procedure; and
- ensure Governors and Principals are trained in the procedure.

Chomh maith leis sin, is féidir le múinteoirí leas a bhaint as comhairleoireacht trí líne chabhrach rúnda teileafóin 24 uair agus trí sheirbhísí oifigigh leasa a bhíonn á gcistiú ag na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne.

Additionally, teachers are able to avail of counselling by means of a 24 hour confidential telephone helpline and the services of welfare officers funded by the Education and Library Boards.

Class Sizes

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education what her Department views as the optimum class size for each year from 1 to 7; and what factors are considered when making such a determination. (AQW 4340/09)

Minister of Education: I would like to see a reduction in pupil:teacher ratio in schools in the North because the PTR has a key role to play, in particular for teachers in schools with significant proportions of disadvantaged pupils, in enabling them to have smaller classes so that they can deal with barriers to learning; give individual help to pupils; or work in small groups.

This is why I have made available extra funding, outside the common funding formula arrangements, to ensure that, from September 2008, classroom assistants are provided for Foundation Stage pupils in all primary schools.

Policy on class sizes is determined having regard to the fact that the quality of early learning is vital to later educational progress. For this reason the Department of Education's policy has been to keep classes for the youngest children at 30 or fewer pupils. The policy was initiated in 1998 and applies to all pupils at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (i.e. years 1-4).

Creidim go bhfuil sé iontach tábhachtach go laghdaítear méideanna ranga. Leis seo a dhéanamh, tá gá le mórinfheistíocht a fháil ón Choiste Feidhmiúcháin agus tá mé ag súil go mór le tacaíocht a fháil ó mo chomhghleacaithe ar an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin i dtaca leis an cheist seo.

I believe it is very important to reduce class sizes, this will require additional resources to be invested by the Executive and I look forward to my colleagues' support on the Executive in relation to this.

Male Teachers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what steps her Department has taken, and will be taking, to address the under-representation of male teachers (i) entering the profession; and (ii) obtaining full time permanent teaching posts; and if she will undertake to urgently investigate the equality implications should this situation remain unresolved. (AQW 4431/09)

Minister of Education: My Department has encouraged, and will continue to encourage, all of the providers of Initial Teacher Education to draw attention to the gender imbalance in the profession.

As a result the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are ensuring that males and females are well represented in publicity materials, and are targeting all male schools and male groups in mixed schools for careers talks and presentations.

Teachers are appointed to permanent positions in schools through open and transparent selection processes. Employers are aware of their statutory duties under employment law and cannot positively discriminate in favour of male applicants. Although employers may encourage applications from males, through affirmative action measures, they would still be subject to the same selection process as female applicants.

Tá mo Roinn lántiomanta do thúsáite a thabhairt do chomhionannas agus ilchineálacht ina croíthosaíochtaí agus ina croífheidhmeanna. Aithním an tábhacht a bhaineann le comhionannas a chur chun cinn san earnáil oideachais, comhionannas inscne san áireamh, agus aithním an ról is féidir bheith ag an oideachas i gcur chun cinn an chomhionannais sa tsochaí ar fad.

My Department is fully committed to integrating equality and diversity into its core priorities and functions. I recognise not only the importance of promoting equality, including gender equality, within education itself, but also the contribution that education can make to promoting equality throughout society.

Capital Projects

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education which capital projects have been delayed due to legal proceedings. (AQW 4472/09)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh stop le trí thionscadal caipitil a bhí á gcur chun cinn ag baint úsáide as an chreatlach móroibreacha mar gheall ar na himeachtaí dlíthiúla. Seo iad mar a leanas:-

The legal proceedings have resulted in three capital projects which were being progressed using the major works framework being stopped. They are as follows:

St Joseph's PS, Madden; Magherafelt HS; and St Colman's PS, Lambeg.

Other projects which had been nearing the stage of being ready for the framework are as follows:-

Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint

Dromintee PS, Newry

St Oliver Plunkett PS, Forkhill

Whitehouse PS, Newtownabbey
 St Mary's PS, Newcastle
 Coranny and Cornagague PS, Enniskillen

My Department has developed an alternative procurement method so that we avoid prolonged delays in delivering projects which are ready to enter the procurement stage. The project for Magherafelt High School has recently been advertised.

Education and Library Boards

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Education if she is aware if any of the Education and Library Boards have money invested in Icelandic banks. (AQW 4477/09)

Minister of Education: I have been advised by each of the 5 Education and Library Boards that they do not have any deposits or investments in Icelandic banks.

Awareness of Abiding by the Law

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education what efforts her Department has made to raise awareness of abiding by the law in schools. (AQW 4490/09)

Minister of Education: Tá oideachas Saoránachta á thabhairt isteach faoi láthair mar chuid éigeantach den churaclam athbhreithnithe do gach duine óg ó Bhliain 1 amach.

Citizenship education is currently being introduced as a compulsory part of the revised curriculum for all young people from Year 1 onwards. This will enable our young people to develop positive relationships with others, develop strategies to promote their own personal safety, be aware of their rights and responsibilities, develop themselves as members of a community, understand that all choices have consequences and understand the importance of rules and laws and the consequence of breaching these, including the effects of anti-social behaviour.

In addition, the Young Citizens Passport, which my Department issues to all Year 11 pupils, provides clear and practical information, including on the law and individual' rights and responsibilities

Educational Psychologists

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education if all Educational Psychologists PhD students who are currently in the last year of studies will be guaranteed their permanent posts at the end of the academic year. (AQW 4580/09)

Minister of Education: I have been advised by the Chief Executives (CEs) of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that the prospects of the 12 students, who are currently in their last year of studies on the Doctorate in Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology course at Queen's University Belfast, obtaining permanent posts are very good as all ELBs will shortly be advertising for permanent educational psychologist posts for which the students will be eligible to apply.

Ní féidir gealltanais a thabhairt, áfach, go bhfaighidh gach mac léinn post buan mar go ndéanfar aon cheapachán de réir phrionsabal an fhiúntais.

There can be no guarantee, however, that all the students will secure a permanent post as any appointment made will be in accordance with the merit principle.

School Meals

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education the percentage of pupils at post-primary schools in the Foyle constituency who were entitled to free school meals, in each of the last six years. (AQW 4591/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table below.

PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS ATTENDING POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE FOYLE CONSTITUENCY, 2003/04 – 2008/09

School Name	Year					
	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09
Lisneal College	n.a.	32	31	32	25	25
St Mary's College, Derry	61	59	56	55	53	51
St Patricks & St Brigids High School	28	27	23	28	26	24
St Joseph's Secondary, Derry	n.a.	54	51	51	47	46
St Peter's High School	71	68	66	65	59	63
St Cecilia's College	50	47	45	42	42	41
St Brigid's College	61	64	61	62	62	61
Immaculate Conception College	60	61	54	57	51	46
Oakgrove Integrated College	32	32	30	31	29	30
Thornhill College	21	22	21	21	19	17
St Columb's College	21	20	21	20	18	18
Foyle & Londonderry College	6	4	5	5	6	6
Lumen Christi College	9	8	7	7	6	6
Faughan Valley High School	34	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Clondermot High School	27	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total For Foyle Constituency	33	34	33	33	30	29

Source: Annual school census.

Notes:

1. n.a. means not available.
2. Figures for 2008/09 may be subject to some minor revision once auditing processes are completed.

St. Eugene's Primary School

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the modernisation programme planned for St. Eugene's Primary School, Derry/Londonderry, that was put on hold last year. (AQW 4593/09)

Minister of Education: Tá athbhreithniú á dhéanamh ag Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil (CCMS) ar an soláthar sa cheantar, a chuimsíonn na trí bhunscoil i bParóiste Naomh Eoghan.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has been reviewing provision in the area, to include all three primary schools in the St Eugene's Parish. CCMS advise that a revised feasibility study and economic appraisal to underpin any revised options are currently underway. CCMS will then undertake a further period of consultation on any options that emerge from that process.

Home Schooling

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education (i) what is her Department's position on the standard of home schooling; and (ii) to outline the most recent figures for the number of school children who are receiving all, or the majority, of their education at home. (AQW 5021/09)

Minister of Education: Ceanglaítear go dleathach ar thuismitheoirí gach páiste d'aois éigeantach scoile a chinntiú go bhfaigheann a bpáistí oideachas lánaimseartha atá oiriúnach dá n-aois, dá gcumas agus dá n-inniúlacht;

trí fhreastal rialta ar scoil nó trí mhodh eile. Is féidir le tuismitheoirí oideachas sa bhaile a roghnú agus níl aon cheanglas dlíthiúil orthu a gcinneadh a chur in iúl don Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne nó don Roinn.

Parents of every child of compulsory school age are legally required to ensure that they receive full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude; either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. Parents can choose to home educate and there is no legal requirement for them to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision.

Should a Board receive notification of a child who is being home educated, an officer will make an initial call to the child's parent to clarify the situation.

The officer will check what education provision is offered, provide general guidance on appropriate materials and exam types and will also provide a contact number for any future advice. Annual home visits are undertaken to discuss the provision and determine if the education provided is suited to the child's age, aptitude and ability. Parents are also often asked to submit an annual report to the Board to ensure the child is progressing.

Any concerns an officer may have regarding the adequacy of the education provision are reported to Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). CASS will then provide advice on curricular provision.

A Working Group, representative of the 5 Education and Library Boards, has recently been established to examine the issues in relation to home education and to make recommendations for a regional policy.

The Department does not collect information on children that are being educated at home. I understand, however, that the Education and Library Boards are currently aware of 186 children, of compulsory school age, who are presently being educated at home.

Home tuition is provided by Education and Library Boards to ensure continuity of education provision for children and young people in a range of circumstances such as recuperating from an illness, awaiting a school placement, following expulsion or assessment of special needs. While tuition can be offered at home, a Board may arrange tuition outside the home environment when at all possible, for example on school premises or in a local library. This approach is an attempt to maintain the habit for the child of leaving home for their tuition. There are cases, in particular for medical reasons, when tuition is home based. I understand from the Education and Library Boards that the most recent figures available indicate that some 392 children and young people are in receipt of such tuition.

Translink

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education how many instances of bullying on (i) school buses; and (ii) Translink buses, in the Ballymena area have been reported to the North Eastern Education and Library Board, in each of the last four years. (AQW 5154/09)

Minister of Education: Ní bhailíonn an Roinn an t-eolas seo. Tuigim, áfach, go bhfuil tuairisc faighte ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt de na cásanna seo a leanas d'iompar tromaíochta le ceithre bliana anuas:

The Department does not collect this information. However, I understand that the North Eastern Education and Library Board has received reports of the following number of incidences of bullying behaviour over the last four years:

Year	Board Buses	Translink Buses	Private Hire Buses
2005/06	1	2	0
2006/07	0	0	0
2007/08	0	5	0
2008/09	0	0	0

Youth Workers

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Education, to confirm, for each Belfast constituency, (i) the level of financial support provided for youth work; (ii) the number of youth clubs; (iii) the number of youth workers; (iv) the number of detached youth workers; and (v) youth numbers. (AQW 5170/09)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education currently provides funding to the Belfast, North Eastern and South Eastern Education and Library Boards as well as the Bytes Project for the provision of youth services in the Belfast area.

Thug Príomhfheidhmeannach gach ceann de na Boird seo agus Stiúrthóir Bytes an t-eolas seo a leanas maidir leis an bhliain 2008/09:

The Chief Executives of each of these Boards and the Director of Bytes have provided the following information relating to the 2008/09 year:

Constituency	Estimated financial support for youth work (£)(1)	Number of youth clubs/ units (2)		Number of youth workers (3)		Number of detached youth workers (3)		Number of young people enrolled/ registered (4)
		FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	
North Belfast	940,508	7	85	10	62	4	0	4,894
East Belfast	713,450	7	95	11	57	1	6	9,914
South Belfast	690,951	5	77	6	66	2	0	6,608
West Belfast	1,615,726	17	56	24	142	11	8	17,326

Notes

- (1) This relates to DE funding for the youth service, including intervention work and community relations programmes.
- (2) This relates to youth clubs/units registered with the Boards or funded by DE through the Bytes Projects. Not all registered clubs/units received funding from the Boards.
- (3) This relates to full-time and part-time youth workers funded, by the Boards or by the Bytes Project, from the DE Youth Service Budget.
- (4) The number of young people recorded for the Bytes projects is based on a census date.

Male Teachers

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many male teachers are employed in both primary and post-primary schools in the Southern Education and Library Board area; and what percentage of the total teacher workforce this represents. (AQW 5186/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table opposite.

MALE TEACHERS EMPLOYED IN SELB IN 2007-08

	Number	As a percentage of teachers in this sector in SELB
Primary schools ¹	311	15.6
Post-primary schools	807	34.5
Primary and post-primary schools	1,118	25.8

¹ includes preparatory departments of grammar schools

Ulster-Scots Language

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to encourage post-primary schools to include the Ulster-Scots language in the curriculum (AQW 5188/09)

Minister of Education: Tugann an curaclam athbhreithnithe, atá a thabhairt isteach agam, níos mó scóipe le hUltais a theagasc, chomh maith leis an oidhreacht a bhaineann léi, ag leibhéal na bunscoile agus ag leibhéal na hiar-bhunscoile.

The revised curriculum, which I am introducing, provides greater scope for the teaching of the Ulster-Scots language, as well as heritage, at both primary and post-primary level. My Department has provided funding for the production of Ulster-Scots primary resource materials, which became available in December 2007. It has also committed to providing similar support in relation to post – primary materials on their completion and is awaiting an approach from the Ulster-Scots Academy Implementation Group on this.

I am currently awaiting recommendations from the joint Queen’s University – University of Ulster subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies on a strategic approach to language learning at all levels for the north of Ireland.

Primary Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education (i) how many children in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area are in composite classes in primary schools; and (ii) what variation has there been in this figure, over the last five years. (AQW 5203/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table below.

PRIMARY PUPILS IN COMPOSITE CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE NORTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD – 2003/04 – 2007/08

Year	Year 1 – 7 pupils in composite classes	% of total year 1 – 7 enrolment
2003/04	9,918	27
2004/05	9,961	27
2005/06	9,877	27
2006/07	8,815	24
2007/08	8,178	23

Source: Annual school census.

Note: Figures relate to pupils in year 1 – 7 in primary schools and grammar school preparatory departments.

Male Teachers

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many male teachers are employed in both primary and post-primary schools in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area; and what percentage of the total teacher workforce this represents (AQW 5205/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table below.

MALE TEACHERS EMPLOYED IN NEELB IN 2007-08

	Number	As a percentage of teachers in this sector in NEELB
Primary schools ¹	251	12.9
Post-primary schools	813	34.3
Primary and post-primary schools	1,064	24.7

¹ includes preparatory departments of grammar schools

Post-Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education whether her new guidance for schools relating to post-primary transfer retains the ban on academic selection as set out in the draft Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. (AQW 5235/09)

Minister of Education: Tugann an treoir a foilsíodh de bhun an ráitis a thug mé don Tionól ar 2 Feabhra 2009 cur síos fíorasach ar an chomhthéacs dleathach ina mbeidh iontrálacha iarbhunscoile á bhfeidhmiú d'Aistriú 2010.

The guidance published on foot of my 2 February 2009 statement to the Assembly provides a factual description of the legal context within which post-primary admissions will operate for Transfer 2010. I have asked all post-primary schools to consider the guidance carefully and adhere to its recommendations. If that request is listened to and acted upon Transfer 2010 will become one of the key building blocks of reform resulting in a system based upon social justice, equality and excellence that treats all of our children equally.

Artigarvan Primary School

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Education what progress has been made with the replacement of Artigarvan Primary School. (AQW 5285/09)

Minister of Education: Tá pleanáil an tionscadail do Artigarvan Primary School á tabhairt chun cinn ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair.

Planning of the project for Artigarvan Primary School is being taken forward by the Western Education and Library Board. I understand the initial sketch plan (Stage C) was approved in January 2009. The WELB have estimated that construction work should start on site in summer 2010 with an estimated completion of around spring 2012.

Primary Schools

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many composite classes are operational in primary schools, in each Education and Library Board areas. (AQW 5291/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table below.

Number of composite classes in primary schools by Education and Library Board – 2007/08

Education and Library Board	Total number of composite classes
BELB	106
WELB	392
NEELB	391
SEELB	242
SELB	520
Total	1,651

Source: Annual school census.

Note: Figures relate to pupils in year 1 – 7 in primary schools and grammar school preparatory departments.

Composite Classes

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education what are her Department's plans to address the composite classes in (i) rural schools; and (ii) the inner city Belfast area; and (iii) provincial towns. (AQW 5293/09)

Minister of Education: Níl sé ar intinn agam athrú a dhéanamh ar na socrúithe fadbhunaithe a ligeann d'aon bhunscoil dheontaschúnta rang cónasctha daltaí a theagasc le múinteoir amháin.

I have no plans to change the long standing arrangements which allow any grant-aided primary school to operate a composite class of pupils under one teacher.

School Buses

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Education how many accidents involving school buses occurred in the Western Education and Library Board area, over the period of severe winter weather. (AQW 5321/09)

Minister of Education: Bhí cúig thimpiste ann san iomlán a raibh busanna scoile páirteach ann. Níor gortaíodh dalta ar bith ná tiománaí ar bith, ní raibh baint ag trú páirtí leis na timpistí agus ní dhearnadh ach miondamáiste (ar a mhéad) do na feithiclí.

The total number of accidents involving school buses was five. In all cases there were no injuries to pupils or drivers, no involvement of a third party and only minor damage (at most) to vehicles.

Education and Library Boards

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education to outline any incidents when the Education and Library Boards have used 'special circumstances' to deviate from their travel policies; and the reasons for these deviations. (AQW 5329/09)

Minister of Education: Le linn na tréimhse cúig bliana go dtí an bhliain acadúil seo, d'fhaomh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) soláthar chúnaimh iompair ón bhaile go dtí an scoil i ndálaí neamhghnácha ar 122 ócáid.

In the 5 year period up to the current academic year the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) approved the provision of home to school transport assistance in exceptional circumstances in 122 cases.

There are many reasons why ELBs provide school transport assistance in exceptional circumstances. These include road safety, medical, welfare/child protection/domestic violence, bullying, community intimidation and travelling community issues. Each case is assessed on its individual circumstances. In many cases transport assistance is only offered for short periods of time to allow personal situations to resolve and does not extend to the full academic year.

School Transport

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education how many children have been refused school transport because live they within the (i) two mile limit for primary schools; and (ii) three mile limit for post primary schools; and how many appeals have been successful. (AQW 5390/09)

Minister of Education: In the 2008/09 academic year 436 primary school pupils and 2,411 post-primary pupils were refused assistance due to them living within the 2 and 3 mile limits respectively. The figures include pupils whose parents had not applied to all suitable schools within the 2 mile/3 mile limits before seeking admission to a more distant school.

Bhí 12 achomharc rathúil ann le linn na tréimhse seo.

There were 12 successful appeals during this period.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education when the fire alarm at the Bangor Academy school building was made viable (AQW 5393/09)

Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt gur cuid den chóras sábháilteachta sa scoil é an t-aláram dóiteáin agus go raibh coimisiúniú an chórais seo mar cheann de na riachtanais le deimhniúchán foriomlán a fháil don fhoirgneamh.

The Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the fire alarm is one of the life safety systems within the school and the commissioning of this system was one of the requirements for overall certification of the building. The Independent Certifier certified the building on 30 April 2008. The fire alarm has been certified as viable since that date. The school opened on 6 May 2008.

Bangor Academy

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education (i) how many classrooms are there in the Bangor Academy; and (ii) how many are available for use. (AQW 5395/09)

Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheiscirt go bhfuil 89 seomra ranga in Bangor Academy agus go bhfuil gach seomra ranga sa scoil ar fáil le húsáid.

The Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that there are 89 classrooms in Bangor Academy and that all of the classrooms in the school are available for use.

Education and Library Boards

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many employees are on secondment; and to which sectors have they been seconded, as part of the Review of Public Administration, in each Education and Library Board. (AQW 5396/09)

Minister of Education: Níl aon fhostaithe ó mo Roinn ar iasacht do na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne mar chuid den Athbhreithniú ar Riarachán Poiblí.

There are no employees of my Department seconded to the Education and Library Boards as part of the Review of Public Administration.

Meetings with MEPs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW4860/09, specifically on how many occasions has she had such meetings. (AQW 5413/09)

Minister of Education: De thairbhe go bhfuil Bairbre de Brún ina ball den pháirtí céanna, bímid beirt ag freastal ar chruinnithe páirtithe go rialta.

As Bairbre de Brún is a member of my party, she and I attend regular party meetings.

To date, I have not received any invitations to meet with the other MEP's.

Entrance Examinations

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education which grammar schools in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, have indicated that they will conduct their own entrance examinations in 2010.

(AQW 5416/09)

Minister of Education: No grammar school in the South-Eastern Education and Library Board area has formally confirmed to me that they intend setting breakaway entrance examinations.

Tá treoir eisithe agam ar Aistriú 2010 a mholann úsáid critéar iontrála neamhacadúil agus tá súil agam go gcloionn gach scoil leis na moltaí sin mar mhaithe le córas a chruthú atá bunaithe ar cheartas sóisialta, ar chomhionannas agus ar shármhaitheas.

I have issued guidance on Transfer 2010 recommending the use of non-academic admissions criteria and hope that all schools will adhere to these recommendations in the interests of creating a system based upon social justice, equality and excellence.

Graduate Teachers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education to provide the most up-to-date figures for the number of teachers who have graduated in the last three years that have yet to take up a full time permanent teaching post.

(AQW 5439/09)

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

The information requested is detailed in the table below:

	2006	2007	2008
Total number of graduates	708	712	725
Number employed in a full-time permanent post	401	286	154
Number not yet in full time teaching posts	307	426	571

Educational and Welfare Officers

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education in relation to Educational and Welfare Officers (i) if they have been placed on a new rate of pay; (ii) when it will be implemented; and (iii) what is the timescale for the payment of back pay.

(AQW 5510/09)

Minister of Education: Is ceistanna iad pá agus téarmaí agus coinníollacha Oifigigh Leasa Oideachais (EWOanna) a bhaineann leis na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna), a bhíonn mar fhostóirí acu.

Pay and terms and conditions of service for Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) are matters for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), as their employers. I understand, from the ELBs, that issues about pay and terms and conditions are dealt with through the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) which is representative of the ELBs and non-teaching Trade Unions, which include NIPSA. The Department is not directly involved in this process.

The five Board JNC agreed an indicative timetable for processing new rates of pay and payment of arrears early in the 2009/10 financial year. Each of the Education and Library Boards has advised of their current position and the information is set out in the table below:

	(i) Have EWOs been placed on new rate of pay?	(ii) When will it be implemented?	(iii) What is the timescale for payment of backpay?
BELB	No	February 2009	Planned for March 2009
NEELB	No	February 2009	Planned for March 2009
SEELB	No	April 2009 at latest	Planned for May 2009 at latest
SELB	No	To be confirmed- early 2009/10 in line with 5 Board agreement.	Likely to be over the summer
WELB	No	Intend to process during March/April with uplift to the new scale in May 2009.	Payment of the arrears will be made at the earliest possible date after that.

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Education how many Civil Service employees there are in her Department in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5524/09)

Minister of Education: Tá 120 ball foirne fostaithe ag an Roinn Oideachais i nDoire.

There are 120 staff employed by the Department of Education in Derry.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5242/09, to outline the impact on her programme of reform if schools choose not to adhere to her guidelines relating to post primary transfer; and choose to use academic selection. (AQW 5561/09)

Minister of Education: Éilítear ar scoileanna “aird a thabhairt” ar an Treoir ar Aistriú 2010.

Schools are required to “have regard to” the Transfer 2010 guidance. Any school that decides thereafter to depart from the recommendations contained within the guidance will help perpetuate the inequalities associated with the outgoing arrangements and risks creating dysfunction within the overall admissions process.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5239/09, to confirm that she may ask schools to adhere to her guidelines, but has no enforcement powers. (AQW 5562/09)

Minister of Education: Mínítear sa treoir ar Aistriú 2010 a foilsíodh de bhun an ráitis a thug mé don Tionól ar 2 Feabhra 2009 go n-éilítear ar scoileanna “aird a thabhairt” ar an treoir.

The Transfer 2010 guidance published on foot of my 2 February 2009 statement to the Assembly explains that schools are required to “have regard to” the guidance.

For schools to have “have regard to” the guidance means that they cannot disregard it. It means that the guidance is an important document for them to consider in developing their admissions criteria and in performing their role within the admissions process.

If a Board of Governors does not comply with its duty to “have regard to” guidance issued by the Department under Article 16B of the Education Order 1997 (as amended by Article 30 of the Education Order 2006), the Department can consider issuing a direction under Article 101 of the 1986 Order directing them to do so.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to the answers to AQW 5227/09 and AQW 4694/09, if she will exercise her Ministerial discretion and release the full legal advice she received from the Departmental Solicitors Office about post-primary transfer arrangements. (AQW 5636/09)

Minister of Education: Glacann gach Roinn comhairle dlí (agus cineálacha eile comhairle riachtanaí) maidir le roinnt mórbheart.

All Departments take legal (and other necessary types of advice) on many major actions. Like all legal advice obtained by Government Departments, this advice is privileged. I do not therefore intend publishing legal advice received in relation to this issue.

However, the legislative basis for the issuing of guidance has already been published. Paragraph 1 of the guidance states that it is issued under Article 30 of the Education Order 2006. I will quote what this Article says: “The Department may issue, and from time to time revise, such guidance as it thinks appropriate in respect of the arrangements for the admission of pupils to grant-aided schools”.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Meetings with MEPs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many meetings he has had with each of the three MEPs from 2007 to date. (AQW 4979/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): From May 2007 to date, in my capacity as Minister for Employment and Learning, I have held one meeting with Jim Nicholson MEP, one meeting with Bairbre de Brun MEP and no meetings with Jim Allister MEP. A meeting was scheduled with Mr Allister in June 2007 in Brussels, but did not take place due to unforeseen circumstances.

Education Courses

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funding per student for a (i) Post Graduate Certificate in Education; (ii) primary Bachelor of Education; and (iii) post-primary Bachelor of Education courses, at universities and colleges, broken down by main subjects. (AQW 4991/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Funding allocations per student to the Northern Ireland Universities and University Colleges for Academic Year 2008/09 were as follows :

	Queen's University Belfast	University of Ulster	University Colleges
(i) Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	£5,134	£4,974	£6,648
(ii) Primary Bachelor of Education (BEd)	-	-	£6,648
(iii) Post-primary Bachelor of Education (BEd)	-	-	£6,648

All Initial Teacher Education at the University Colleges is funded at the same rate irrespective of subject area. The Bachelor of Education degree is not offered at the universities.

Irish Medium Education Post Graduate Certificate

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of lecturers teaching Irish Medium Education Post Graduate Certificate in Education courses in each teaching institution, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4992/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Responsibility for the provision of Irish Medium Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses rests primarily with St Mary's University College, Belfast.

The College advises that, in each of the last five years, it has employed twenty lecturers who contribute to teaching on its PGCE (Primary) course.

An additional lecturer at the College provides Irish Medium Immersion Education for students of Queen's University and the University of Ulster who are enrolled on PGCE (Secondary) courses which have an element of Irish at these institutions.

Irish Medium Education Post Graduate Certificate

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students at each teacher training institution who (i) are working towards a Post Graduate Certificate in Irish Medium Education; and (ii) have qualified with a Post Graduate Certificate in Irish Medium Education, in the last five years.

(AQW 5010/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of students at St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College who (i) are working towards a Post Graduate Certificate in Irish Medium Education; and (ii) have qualified with a Post Graduate Certificate in Irish Medium Education, in the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	St Mary's		Stranmillis	
	Enrolments	Qualifications	Enrolments	Qualifications
2003/04	15	15	0	0
2004/05	20	20	0	0
2005/06	15	15	0	0
2006/07	15	15	0	0
2007/08	15	15	0	0

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the percentage of 16 to 18 year olds who have received education maintenance allowance, in each year since 2001; and to outline the correlation of the payments with an increase in the number of students continuing on with education to study for 'A' levels.

(AQW 5019/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme was introduced in September 2004 by the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Education. The scheme was rolled out incrementally to 16, 17, 18 and 19 year olds across Northern Ireland, in line with the rest of the UK, with full roll-out achieved in academic year 2007/08.

The table below details the number and percentage of 16 -18 year olds who have received EMA payments, up to and including academic year 2007/08.

Academic Year	Number of students in receipt of EMA	Percentage of students in receipt of EMA
2004/05 (16 year olds only)	10,593	39.26%
2005/06 (16 & 17 year olds)	18,429	34.42%
2006/07 (16,17 & 18 year olds)	19,857	25.45%
2007/08 (16,17 & 18 year olds)	19,518	25.58%

As the EMA scheme was only fully rolled out in 2007/08, a full statistical analysis of trends has not yet been undertaken to establish whether, among other factors, there is a correlation between EMA payments and the number of students continuing on with education to study for 'A' levels. This analysis will form part of the Departments' planned review of the EMA scheme which is scheduled to commence later this year.

University of Ulster

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide the number of students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5023/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religion for those studying at NI institutions is only collected for NI domiciled students. Therefore, the number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2003/04	4,465	6,380	550	2,290	13,690
2004/05	4,415	6,420	365	2,550	13,750
2005/06	4,670	6,900	235	2,045	13,850
2006/07	4,000	6,405	125	1,475	12,005
2007/08	3,685	6,105	105	2,010	11,905

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

University of Ulster

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide the number of students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5024/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religion for those studying at NI institutions is only collected for NI domiciled students. Therefore, the number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2003/04	1,855	1,845	225	490	4,420
2004/05	1,935	1,740	125	440	4,240
2005/06	2,200	1,950	90	275	4,520
2006/07	2,145	1,860	55	190	4,250
2007/08	2,110	1,760	60	315	4,245

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

University of Ulster

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail students enrolled on courses at University of Ulster, Belfast, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5026/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religion for those studying at NI institutions is only collected for NI domiciled students. Therefore, the number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Belfast, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2003/04	420	485	100	190	1,195
2004/05	440	460	75	220	1,190
2005/06	500	525	55	130	1,210
2006/07	475	495	25	70	1,060
2007/08	450	545	25	100	1,120

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

Skills Development

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what co-operation exists between bodies responsible for skills development and the Republic of Ireland's Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN).
(AQW 5028/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department, via the Skills Expert Group (SEG), and the EGFSN first met in November 2006 and subsequently worked together to produce an All- Island Skills Study in October 2008. This study was presented to stakeholders at the jointly hosted Skills Conference in Londonderry on 9 October 2008.

My Department continues to work with the EGFSN, and other relevant organisations, to ensure that we have skills needed to take advantage of future economic opportunities.

University of Ulster

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide the number of students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Magee, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5073/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religion for those studying at NI institutions is only collected for NI domiciled students. Therefore, the number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at the University of Ulster, Magee, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2003/04	475	2,080	115	360	3,035
2004/05	525	2,215	70	425	3,240
2005/06	590	2,395	50	335	3,370
2006/07	530	2,230	25	105	2,890
2007/08	530	2,090	15	295	2,935

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

Queens University

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide the number of students enrolled in courses at Queens University, Belfast, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5074/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religion for those studying at NI institutions is only collected for NI domiciled students. Therefore, the number of NI domiciled students enrolled in courses at Queens University, Belfast, broken down by religious background, in each of the last five years is detailed in the table below:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2003/04	6,495	7,770	645	5,140	20,055
2004/05	6,785	8,020	740	5,795	21,340
2005/06	7,360	8,565	850	4,255	21,030
2006/07	6,510	7,920	760	5,295	20,485
2007/08	6,735	8,245	1,105	3,540	19,630

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and due to rounding the sum of figures in each row may not match the total.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.
- (3) Religious affiliation is not a mandatory question and has a high non-response rate.

Tuition Costs at Queen's University

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what information his Department has regarding potential increases in tuition costs at Queen's University from £3,145 to £6,000. (AQW 5082/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department has not received any information to this effect.

The Higher Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 regulates the fee levels which can be charged to eligible students in Northern Ireland. Institutions can only charge up to the maximum level set for a particular academic year which, for academic year 2008/2009 is £3,145. Under provisions in the Order this maximum level is capped, rising only with inflation, until January 2010 after which any increase beyond this would require the approval of the Assembly.

An independent review of variable tuition fees and student finance arrangements is currently underway and is due to conclude in early 2010. This review will inform future student finance policy for Northern Ireland.

Life Long Learning Programmes

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he is considering dropping the requirement for match funding for community based life long learning programmes. (AQW 5083/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF) Programme provides all projects in Priority One with 65% programme funding, made up of 40% from EU Funds and 25% contribution from my Department. The remaining 35% 'match funding' must be secured independently from other public sources by the project promoters. This is the same procedure as was used for previous ESF Programmes and was endorsed by stakeholders in their response to the public consultation process held in March 2007. The 2007-13 ESF funding allocation for Northern Ireland has reduced by more than 50% from the level of the previous Programme. Maintaining an overall 65% level of Programme funding with the requirement for 35% other public match funding has enabled the previous levels of activity to continue, despite the reduced overall allocation.

I have no plans to amend the match funding requirement for the existing call and will review the future position in due course.

University of Ulster

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if the proposals by the University of Ulster for its Belfast campus will have an impact on the proposed merger of Stranmillis College with Queen's University. (AQW 5123/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The proposals by the University of Ulster for its Belfast campus are not included in the economic appraisal for the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University, Belfast. In evaluating the merger proposals the Department will take into account all relevant factors.

University of Ulster

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many extra student places and courses will be created under the University of Ulster's proposal for the Belfast campus. (AQW 5163/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In November 2008 I received an economic appraisal from the University of Ulster detailing development proposals for its Jordanstown campus, which includes the potential for capital investment in its Belfast campus. My Department has not received any detailed proposals in respect of the University's other campuses.

I am advised by the University that it intends to redistribute its existing student places between its Jordanstown and Belfast campuses. Whilst not increasing the number of full-time places offered, the University anticipates that the development of its Belfast campus may lead to an increase in the number of students undertaking part-time courses.

I am also advised by the University that it is difficult for it to be explicit about the number of courses that will be created under the proposals for the Belfast campus. However, the University will continue to respond to, and meet the needs of, the market, as appropriate.

It is imperative that any proposals my Department receives meet Green Book standards. Those proposals will, if approved by my Department, be sent to the Department of Finance and Personnel for consideration. If that Department is satisfied, the matter will come back to my Department for a policy appraisal. The process is in its very early stages and my Department will be better placed to make a judgement as further details become available.

Steps to Work Programme

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what the take up of the Steps to Work Programme is. (AQW 5164/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: During the period 29 September 2008 to 6 February 2009 inclusive 2,567 people participated on Steps to Work.

University of Ulster

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if teacher training courses will be included in the University of Ulster's proposals for the Belfast campus. (AQW 5165/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am advised by the University that it will not be offering teacher training courses at its Belfast campus.

University of Ulster

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to the announcement that the University of Ulster campus at Magee would achieve a student growth of 5,500 to 6,000 students; (i) what is the time-scale to reach that target; (ii) if the previously announced eventual target figure of 10,000 students still stands; and (iii) what is the expected time-scale to meet the target of 10,000 students. (AQW 5211/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am advised by the University that;

- (i) The Magee campus is currently operating at capacity and the University anticipates a timescale of 5-6 years to reach the projected student growth, although this is subject to the acquisition of a site for an additional building or buildings.
- (ii) An increase in student numbers to 10,000 at its Magee campus remains a medium to longer term aspiration for the University. However, the University believes that it is important to concentrate on achieving the ambitious shorter term plans as announced recently.
- (iii) During the planning period, areas for potential growth will be identified and these are likely to focus on postgraduate and part-time provision where course activity at the Magee campus is currently under-represented. Cognisance will also continue to be given to government policies and other environmental factors, including the possible future partnership between the University and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. The next stage of the campus development will be subject to continuous review and, at this stage, it is not possible to identify the scale and pace of these future developments. Any growth in full time undergraduate student numbers will have a significant financial impact for government and any potential expansion of Magee must be viewed in this context.

Unemployment in Craigavon

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to assist unemployed people in Craigavon to return to work following recent announcements of job losses. (AQW 5226/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department provides information and advice to unemployed people in Craigavon to help them find alternative employment or identify opportunities to retrain under the Department's employment and training programmes. In a number of cases Jobs & Benefits staff have delivered on-site clinics directly to those who had received notices of redundancy. These services have included work focused interviews, action planning and information and advice on the range of measures to improve their job prospects.

Jobs & Benefits office staff delivered on-site clinics to employees of Moypark, Huhtamaki, Seagoe, R A Irwin's, and NACCO and further clinics have been arranged for NACCO Materials and Henry Denny. SSA staff may also attend clinics and provide advice on benefits.

In the 10 months up to January 2009, the Department assisted 1418 people in Craigavon to move from benefits into employment.

Programme for Government Targets

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4784/09, what engagement he has had with Executive colleagues to meet Programme for Government targets for skills and employment. (AQW 5228/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A large proportion of the targets relating to skills and employment within the Programme for Government targets are the responsibility of my Department. However, clearly some targets do require joint working with other Departments, for example the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I and my officials work with Ministers and officials in these relevant Departments on an ongoing, collaborative basis to deliver these targets and quarterly meetings between the senior management of the three departments will be used to monitor progress against the shared targets.

Employment Levels

Mr S Moutray asked he Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4784/09, what steps he is taking to ensure that employment levels remain as high as possible during the current economic downturn. (AQW 5230/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department contributes to the overall level of employment by assisting employers to fill vacancies and by helping individuals to address their barriers to employment and move

towards and into employment through accessing employment, training, apprenticeship and up-skilling provision. The Department also provides assistance for those already in work to update and improve their skills levels. In the 9 months to December 2008, over 19,500 individuals were assisted to move from welfare to work. The Department continues to work with employers and review provision to meet the needs of the changing client profile.

A comprehensive range of services is available through my Department's Jobs and Benefits offices and JobCentres and through contracted Providers to help individuals find employment and to help employers find workers. The services include mandatory work-focused interviews; action planning for certain clients and measures designed to improve the job prospects for those who have become unemployed.

University Students

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students at university are registered as having speech difficulties. (AQW 5232/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Disabilities are recorded against the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) guidelines as categorised below:

Blind, Partially Sighted, Deaf, Wheelchair user, Unseen Disability (i.e. Diabetes), Motor Autistic Spectrum and Dyslexia.

Students having speech difficulties may be recorded under one of the above existing categories, and/or may have more than one disability.

The University of Ulster currently uses these categories to record disabilities and does not therefore have statistics relating specifically to students having speech difficulties. Queen's University has been able to confirm that it currently has four students with speech difficulties registered with the University's Disability Services Unit.

University Students

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students at university are registered as having sight difficulties. (AQW 5233/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment. In the academic year 2007/08, there were 360 students enrolled on higher education courses at Northern Ireland higher education institutions who were self assessed as being blind or partially sighted.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figure has been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

University Students

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students at university are registered as having learning difficulties. (AQW 5236/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on disability is collected on the basis of a student's self assessment. In the academic year 2007/08, there were 1,175 students enrolled on higher education courses at Northern Ireland higher education institutions who were self assessed as having a specific learning difficulty.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- (1) Figure has been rounded to the nearest 5.
- (2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

University Students

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students at colleges are registered as having speech difficulties. (AQW 5237/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: While Further Education Colleges collect information on the number of their students who have disabilities, they do not collect, routinely, information on the nature of those disabilities. Therefore, information is not available readily on the number of college students registered as having speech difficulties.

Apprentices

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprentices have been able to continue the academic section of their apprenticeship despite losing their employment, since September 2008, in the East Londonderry constituency. (AQW 5259/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: You will be aware that contingency arrangements were introduced from 1st December 2008, for apprentices who had been made redundant from the construction, engineering, and motor vehicle sectors, and that these arrangements apply to any apprentices who have been redundant from 1st September 2008. The interventions will permit apprentices to complete their Technical Certificate, Essential Skills, and the NVQ element where a work placement has been achieved.

The Department has carried out a full monitoring exercise, in conjunction with Training Providers, on apprentices who have been made redundant and their current training positions. In Londonderry, a total of 35 apprentices have been made redundant since 1st April 2008. This total can be broken down as follows:

Construction – 30

Engineering – 5

Automotive – 0

The current status of these apprentices is as follows:

- 15 have been referred to the Careers Service for advice on further training;
- 11 have found alternative employment;
- 8 are continuing to train under Further Education provision; and
- the remaining one apprentice has not maintained contact with the training supplier.

For those apprentices who have been referred to the Careers Service, they will be advised of the training contingency arrangements that are available to them and, should they choose to do so, will be eligible to continue training under either Steps to Work or Training for Success.

Job Vacancies

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to confirm the number of job vacancies registered in job centres by Parliamentary constituency. (AQW 5304/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: On Friday 20 February my Department had 1,554 live vacancies, containing 3,190 positions displayed on the Department's job vacancy system used by JobCentres/Jobs & Benefit Offices (JBO) across Northern Ireland. The Department uses the term 'vacancy' to describe a single advertisement of one or more positions, by an employer and the term 'positions' to describe the actual number of jobs available.

I am unable to provide the information you requested by Parliamentary constituency. The data is only available by JobCentre/ JBO catchment area which does not readily map onto Parliamentary constituency areas. Vacancies are recorded by Office receiving them and are available to jobseekers across Northern Ireland.

The table indicates the number of vacancies and positions by JobCentre / JBO area at 2.35pm on 20 February. The number of vacancies and positions will change as new vacancies are added and filled vacancies are removed.

You should note that these figures reflect the vacancies notified to my Department and do not represent the total number of jobs available to jobseekers in Northern Ireland.

NUMBER OF VACANCIES AND POSITIONS AT 20 FEBRUARY 2009

Office Name	Vacancies	Positions
Andersonstown	23	41
Antrim	41	47
Armagh	34	227
Ballymena	54	79
Ballymoney	14	36
Ballynahinch	19	24
Banbridge	38	50
Bangor	92	122
Belfast North	93	198
Carrickfergus	18	18
Coleraine	75	151
Cookstown	16	16
Downpatrick	25	29
Dungannon	26	31
Enniskillen	71	71
Falls Road	43	113
Foyle/ Lisnagelvin	79	208
Hollywood Road	61	105
Kilkeel	1	4
Knockbreda	24	31
Larne	6	6
Limavady	22	24
Lisburn	54	83
Lurgan	65	70
Magherafelt	25	40
Newcastle	34	36
Newry	84	99
Newtownabbey	39	146
Newtownards	75	139
Omagh	31	55
Portadown	59	151
Shaftesbury Square	169	673
Shankill	27	46
Strabane	17	21
Grand Total	1554	3190

University Courses

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students from the West Tyrone constituency have attended university but failed to complete their courses, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5319/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on students attending university but failing to complete their courses is not readily available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) datasets held by my Department. It is not possible to accurately extract information from these datasets on students that attend university but fail to complete their course. Through contact with HESA, they have clarified that in order to answer this question correctly, it would involve an extensive linking exercise of students from West Tyrone across different academic years to see if they completed their course and would involve significant resources to undertake.

Planned Expansion of Belfast City Airport

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the employment benefits that would result from the expansion of Belfast City Airport. (AQW 5388/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As Minister for Employment and Learning, it is not appropriate for me to engage in the planning debate in respect of Belfast City Airport. My Department works closely with employers to assist them to fill vacancies and to encourage them to train and upskill the existing workforce.

My Department also continually assesses the services and 'back to work' provision available for unemployed clients to help them move towards and into employment.

Should the proposed expansion go ahead, officials in the Employment Service will be ready to assist the employer in the usual way.

Planned Expansion of Belfast City Airport

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he welcomes the commitment to create apprenticeships as part of the planned expansion of Belfast City Airport. (AQW 5389/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I have always maintained that investing in employees and in staff training, especially during these difficult economic times, is key to employers being in a position to maximise commercial opportunities when the economy becomes favourable again.

It is not appropriate for me, in my role as Minister for Employment and Learning, to engage in the planning debate in respect of Belfast City Airport, as this would fall under the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment. Nevertheless, I would welcome any commitment for apprentices to be given the opportunity to be employed, to be paid a salary, and to develop and achieve the occupational skills and qualifications that are required by employers in their particular sector.

Students from West Tyrone

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students from the West Tyrone constituency have gone to university in each of the last five years. (AQW 5400/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of students from the West Tyrone parliamentary constituency, who have enrolled on the first year of a higher education course, at a Higher Education Institution in the UK, in each of the last five years, is detailed in the table below:

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
First Year Enrolments	1,385	1,390	1,465	1,290	1,325

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

(1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

(2) The latest available data are for 2007/08.

Departmental Staff

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many employees in his Department travel from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast for work . (AQW 5525/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of staff employed by the Department for Employment and Learning travelling to Belfast for work from Derry/Londonderry is 10.

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Civil Service employees there are in his Department in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5527/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The number of staff employed by the Department for Employment and Learning in Derry/Londonderry is 125.

Public Calls for 'British jobs for British workers'

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of public calls for 'British jobs for British workers'. (AQO 2129/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Much has been made of the phrase 'British jobs for British workers' implying that local people should have priority for jobs over those from other EU countries or those legitimately in the UK workforce. This is not legally possible, nor is this necessarily desirable. Migrants who are legally entitled to work here have the same employment rights as local workers.

It is vitally important that we ensure those seeking employment here are trained and equipped to compete for the local jobs which are available now and those which will arise in the future. To this end my Department operates extensive programmes to train and develop both those seeking employment and those already in work.

It is also important to us that all Member States abide by the EU employment laws. These protect both Northern Irish people seeking work elsewhere in the EU and local companies competing for contracts in Europe.

University of Ulster

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline plans for the Jordanstown site of the University of Ulster. (AQO 2133/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Proposals for the Jordanstown site form part of the University of Ulster's recently announced strategic development plan for changes across all four of the University's campuses.

Under these proposals the focus at Jordanstown will centre on the maintenance and development of world class sporting facilities, subjects related to sport and to specialist engineering activities. In addition the University will retain its student residence provision on the Jordanstown campus.

Implementation of the proposals will depend on my Department approving the redevelopment plans, the availability of funding, and the competition of any appropriate Environmental and Equality impact assessments. The Jordanstown plan is still under consideration and I await the outcome.

Titanic Signature Project

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans his Department has to work with partners in employment, including the Titanic Quarter Ltd., to ensure maximum opportunities for the unemployed, and long-term unemployed particularly in East Belfast, in relation to (i) the Titanic Signature Project; and (ii) further planned developments. (AQO 2134/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is engaged with Harcourt Construction, Titanic Quarter Ltd., Belfast City Council, Invest Northern Ireland and other companies based in the Titanic Quarter to meet their current and future skills needs.

It is also represented on the East Belfast Partnership Board, in particular through the Employability Group which is focused on a number of developments including Titanic Quarter. The Department is, also, planning to second a member of staff to Belfast City Council to work specifically on the Titanic project.

Review of Teacher Training

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of whether the proposed Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College merger is premature in the absence of the long awaited DEL/DENI Teacher Training Review and the concerns outlined in the Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning's Report on the Review of Teacher Training. (AQO 2135/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast has been put forward as the result of a unanimous vote by the Governing Body of Stranmillis. My Department is currently examining an economic appraisal for the proposed merger to ensure its compliance with Green Book standards. Any merger will ultimately be subject to Committee and Assembly approval and I believe that process will give ample opportunity to consider issues such as the Review of Teacher Education and the recommendations in the Stakeholder Review of Teacher Education completed recently by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Lisburn College

Mr E Poots asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what additional courses will be offered at the new Lisburn College when it is complete. (AQO 2136/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The new Lisburn campus of the South Eastern Regional College will be available from Spring 2010. The college is currently reviewing its new prospectus for the 2009/10 academic year in light of the current requirements of the local economy. In addition, the college has advised that, ahead of the new campus opening in Lisburn, it is developing its performing arts courses which, until the new college opens, will be facilitated at the Island Centre in Lisburn. This will enable current and new students to avail of a full range of programmes before construction work on the new campus is complete.

Autism Northern Ireland

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what meetings he has held with Autism Northern Ireland, in the last year. (AQO 2137/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Within the last year, no meetings have been requested, nor have I held any meetings with Autism Northern Ireland.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight DEL's Disablement Advisory Service (DAS) which provides a pan disability service. DAS provision is open to people with a wide range of disabilities including those with Autism.

My Department, through Occupational Psychology Services, provides an enhanced assessment service for customers with disabilities, including Autism, to help these customers make informed decisions in relation to training and employment.

Furthermore, I sit on two Inter-Ministerial Groups which look at a range of Mental Health issues, including Autism.

University of Ulster

Mr A McFarland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the performance of the University of Ulster in the recent Research Assessment Exercise. (AQO 2138/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am very pleased with the performance of both our universities in the recent UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise. The University of Ulster achieved three top three positions in the UK in the areas of Biomedical Sciences, Celtic Studies and Nursing. A further seven subjects are ranked amongst the top twenty and 93.3 per cent of researchers entered are working in disciplines where world leading

research is taking place. The league table produced by the Times Higher Education shows that the University moved 18 places from 63rd in the UK in 2001, to 45th in 2008.

Migrant Workers

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps he is taking to protect the rights of migrant workers, against discrimination in the context of the economic downturn. (AQO 2139/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Migrant workers working legally in Northern Ireland have the same employment rights as all other workers. Relevant departments can take action against employers who breach enforceable rights, for example, National Minimum Wage (HMRC).

My Department employs two employment agency inspectors who carry out inspections of Northern Ireland-based agencies to ensure compliance with employment agency legislation. The Department has powers to prosecute or apply to prohibit agencies in serious or repeated breach of the law.

I will shortly introduce an Employment Bill in the Assembly. It will include measures to enhance the Department's agency investigation and prosecution powers, and provide for the lawful exchange of information between the Department's employment agency inspectors and HMRC National Minimum Wage Compliance Officers.

The Department is updating its "Your Rights at Work" guide, which is designed to make workers aware of their legal rights. It will be available in several languages. The Law Centre, which is part-funded by my Department, has recently produced a booklet entitled "Exploited?" which is available in 12 languages.

A Departmental official chairs the Employment Inspection and Enforcement Working Sub-group of the Migrant Workers Thematic Group.

The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 outlaws discrimination on grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin and makes racial discrimination unlawful in employment. An amendment to the Race Relations Order in 2003 implements the European 'Race Directive' (Council Directive 2000/43/EC) here. These amendments give people greater protection from unlawful racial discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origins.

Lecturers' Pay Dispute

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the ongoing further education lecturers' pay dispute; and what flexibility the UK Treasury has given to address this matter. (AQO 2140/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: There has been no agreement on a pay settlement for 2008/09 as yet. Fresh talks, facilitated by the Labour Relations Agency, are continuing between the college employers and the lecturers' unions. Both sides are exploring fully the scope for settlement within the constraints of public sector pay policy.

The application of public sector pay policy is a devolved matter for the Northern Ireland Executive, which has chosen to follow Treasury guidelines in respect of civil service pay on this matter. Any scope for flexibility is contained within those guidelines. At present, the guidelines state that public sector staff groups must adhere to a 2% basic pay award within a 3.75% earnings growth limit.

Queen's University

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of whether his Department compromised its independence by briefing the Board of Governors of Stranmillis University College about funding issues on the morning the decision was taken to merge with Queen's University, Belfast. (AQO 2141/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A senior Departmental official attended a meeting on 17 April 2008 at the request of the Chair of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College. The meeting was attended by the Governing Body and a range of other people, including staff members. The Departmental official provided factual information on a unit-based funding model. I do not believe this in any way compromised the Department's independence.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr D Ford asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the review of the Construction Industry Training Board. (AQO 2143/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The review is nearing completion. Deloitte Consultants have completed the fieldwork, survey and the analysis of findings. The draft report is due to be received by the Department in the near future.

Queen's University

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the Report of the Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning on the Review of Teacher Training, whether Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College should now suspend their proposed merger to help create the fullest opportunity to assess the future of teacher training provision. (AQO 2144/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast has been put forward as the result of a unanimous vote by the Governing Body of Stranmillis. My Department is currently examining an economic appraisal for the proposed merger to ensure its compliance with Green Book standards. Any merger will ultimately be subject to Committee and Assembly approval and I believe that process will give ample opportunity to consider issues such as the recommendations in the Stakeholder Review of Teacher Education completed recently by the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Apprentices

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of how the economic downturn is impacting on apprenticeships. (AQO 2145/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department has already exceeded its target of having 10,000 apprentices on programme by March 2010. The increases are across many different sectors but there has been a significant drop in the recruitment rate for some sectors related to construction.

It is also of interest that of this year's occupancy, some 40% are apprentices over the age of 25 years. This confirms that employers are taking advantage of the removal of the age barrier for apprenticeships but it also suggests that in the current situation that they may be training existing staff rather than recruiting new apprentices.

A further impact on apprentices is the numbers that have been made redundant, particularly from the construction industry. Although the Department has introduced contingency arrangements to allow these apprentices to continue training, it would appear that not all apprentices are availing of these opportunities. The Department is considering how best to address this issue.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Visitors Centre at the Giants Causeway

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how public money will be allocated for the new visitors centre at the Giants Causeway. (AQW 4950/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): An application and business plan for financial assistance of £9.25million for the new visitor centre at the Giant's Causeway was received in December 2008 by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board under its Tourism Development Scheme.

The application will be assessed through the established appraisal system and any recommendation to offer financial assistance will be submitted for Ministerial approval.

Meetings with MEPs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many meetings she has had with each of the three MEPs from 2007 to date. (AQW 4980/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: During the period 2007 to date I have had one meeting with Jim Nicolson and Bairbre De Brún. My predecessor had one meeting with Jim Allister.

Invest NI

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of co-operation that exists between Invest NI and the Irish Development Agency. (AQW 5025/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Comprehensive Study on the All-Island Economy, published by the British and Irish Governments in October 2006, identified opportunities for increased cooperation between Invest NI and the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) Ireland.

Although the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment is an area where the economic development agencies in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are in direct competition with each other, it is clear that the island as a whole faces increasing competition from emerging economies for mobile inward investment. To this end, the Boards and officials of Invest NI and the IDA meet regularly to promote opportunities for collaboration which clearly exhibit the potential for mutual benefit for both jurisdictions.

Both agencies are in agreement that the focus for collaboration between IDA Ireland and Invest NI should be on strengthening the business operating environment, e.g. Communication, Infrastructure, Skills, Legislative Policy, Business Environment and Knowledge/Research and the examination of how Invest NI and IDA can work together to jointly influence and improve this in a manner that would increase the attractiveness of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to FDI.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what the outcome was from her deliberations with the Prime Minister about Presbyterian Mutual Society investors. (AQW 5051/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: A suitable opportunity for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to meet with the Prime Minister to discuss the Presbyterian Mutual Society is in the course of being agreed.

International Financial Services in Dublin

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created since the implementation of the agreement in April 2008 that allowed companies based at the International Financial Services in Dublin to expand into Northern Ireland. (AQW 5131/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It is important to note that there has been a downturn in the Irish Economy in the second half of 2008. This includes a substantial adjustment in the Irish housing market, international financial market turbulence, higher commodity and food prices. This has led to a greater than anticipated slowdown in growth and higher-than-expected inflation. Such pressures have led many companies in Dublin to reevaluate their operations. This means that many organisations that had been in expansion mode in 2007 have started to lay off staff.

As a result, there have been no jobs created in the financial services sector in Northern Ireland following the agreement in April 2008 that allows companies based at the International Financial Services in Dublin to expand into Northern Ireland. The prospects for expansion projects in the financial services sector are not as strong as this time last year.

Notwithstanding this challenging short-term outlook, the Invest NI Dublin office has a healthy pipeline of projects both within in the financial services and ICT/software arena. The general profile and size of investments from the Republic of Ireland has also moved towards smaller projects in terms of total staff but higher quality

jobs which pay higher average salaries. Such a trend is evident right across the British Isles. The April 2008 agreement will enhance Northern Ireland's prospects of capturing these jobs once the Irish economy recovers.

Independent News and Media Group

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of grant her Department provided to the Independent News and Media Group for their new premises in Newry.

(AQW 5169/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI offered the Independent News and Media Group £1.06million of support against a £20million investment in new printing capacity located in Carnbane Industrial Estate, Newry in 2007.

The facility, which is the world's first full colour Goss FPS press, has attracted a skilled, highly-paid workforce.

The project has been fully implemented and, to date, Invest NI has provided £814,078.68 of the assistance offered.

Small Businesses

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if there is support available for small businesses that are affected by foreign governments who have suspended payments to local companies.

(AQW 5190/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Export Credits Guarantee Department, the UK's official Export Credit Agency, provides political risk insurance in addition to covering commercial risks.

Unemployment

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for (a) the total number; and (b) the percentage, of the workforce who were unemployed in each council area in the last twelve months.(AQW 5231/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The total number of Claimant Count unemployed persons and the corresponding percentage of the resident working age population in each District Council area in Northern Ireland at January 2009 and one year previously at January 2008 are shown in the table attached.

The figures in the table are not seasonally adjusted and the rates are expressed as a percentage of working age.

District Council	January 2008		January 2009	
	Number Unemployed	Percentage of Working Age	Number Unemployed	Percentage of Working Age
Antrim	481	1.5	942	2.9
Ards	820	1.7	1,296	2.7
Armagh	581	1.7	1,061	3.0
Ballymena	607	1.6	1,092	2.9
Ballymoney	371	2.0	700	3.8
Banbridge	320	1.1	709	2.4
Belfast	5,902	3.5	7,997	4.8
Carrickfergus	414	1.7	750	3.0
Castlereagh	431	1.1	707	1.8
Coleraine	838	2.4	1,441	4.2
Cookstown	315	1.4	786	3.6
Craigavon	1,028	1.9	1,967	3.6

District Council	January 2008		January 2009	
	Number Unemployed	Percentage of Working Age	Number Unemployed	Percentage of Working Age
Derry	2,807	4.1	3,885	5.7
Down	862	2.0	1,437	3.4
Dungannon	449	1.3	1,176	3.5
Fermanagh	770	2.0	1,318	3.5
Larne	326	1.7	594	3.1
Limavady	588	2.7	1,220	5.6
Lisburn	1,232	1.8	2,141	3.1
Magherafelt	283	1.0	819	3.0
Moyle	300	3.0	507	5.0
Newry&Mourne	1,156	2.0	2,116	3.6
Newtownabbey	807	1.6	1,309	2.6
North Down	760	1.6	1,096	2.3
Omagh	654	2.0	1,116	3.5
Strabane	1,009	4.2	1,399	5.8
Northern Ireland	24,111	2.2	39,581	3.6

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contact her Department has had with (i) landowners; and (ii) developers leading up to the award of the Kelvin Project. (AQW 5269/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department has had a wide variety of contacts in relation to this project and will not always be aware if a contact is either a landowner or developer. Officials have had contact with interested parties in Belfast, Cookstown, Coleraine, Londonderry and Fermanagh in relation to this project.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations her Department received about Project Kelvin. (AQW 5270/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department has received a wide range of representations from parties interested in this project including individuals, businesses, District Councils and potential investors across a number of locations in Northern Ireland.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what formal meetings she held with her officials in relation to Project Kelvin. (AQW 5271/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I have had no meetings which were focused exclusively on Project Kelvin. The Project has however been raised at a number of meetings and briefings, for example in relation to the discussion of wider telecommunications policy.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the process and consultation that took place with the Department of Communication, Marine and Natural Resources regarding the change of location of the Project Kelvin landing point from the city of Derry/Londonderry to another location in County Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5272/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: This is a joint project between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources and representatives from both Departments were involved in writing the Invitation to Tender (ITT) and evaluating tenders. The ITT stated that the landing point must be along the coast of either County Londonderry or County Antrim, west of a point due south of the westerly extremity of Rathlin Island. The winning tender located the landing point in Portrush which met the terms of the ITT.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the procedure that led to the change of technical specification and tender documents for the Project Kelvin from the city of Derry/Londonderry to another location in County Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5273/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The procurement process was conducted in line with guidance issued by Central Procurement Directorate, Department of Finance and Personnel. A project team, comprising representatives from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Central Procurement Directorate and MPD (the technical consultants) for the project, agreed an Invitation to Tender which was published on 2 July 2008. Subsequently, there was an Open Meeting for tenderers on 21 July 2008. At this meeting a number of questions were asked by those attending including one question which asked whether the telehouse needed to be located in the city of Londonderry. The project team saw no technical reason why the telehouse had to be located in the city of Londonderry and this was communicated to prospective tenderers at the Open Day.

Renewable Sources

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action his Department is taking to reach the Programme for Government's goal for 12% of electricity usage to be generated from indigenous renewable sources by 2012. (AQW 5289/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The main mechanism for supporting the increase in renewable electricity is the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO). This has proved successful in incentivising the increase of renewable electricity to its current level of 7%. I am confident that the 12% target will be met, primarily from onshore wind.

The NIRO is currently under revision to make it more efficient and enable more targeted support to be given different renewable technologies. In addition, my Department is working on strategies to support further renewable electricity targets to 2020 which will be brought forward for consultation as part of the new Strategic Energy Framework later this year.

Unemployment Numbers

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the number of people who have become unemployed since April 2008, broken down by (i) age; and (ii) gender. (AQW 5303/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and detailed estimates of the increase in unemployment by age and gender are not available from it due to sample size constraints.

The following tables are sourced to the claimant count measure of unemployment. These show the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits at April 2008 and at January 2009, along with the net change between these two dates broken down by (i) age and (ii) gender.

Age	Number of Claimants - April 2008	Number of Claimants - January 2009	Net Change
Under 18	40	70	30
18	1,230	1,805	575
19	1,450	2,235	785
20-24	5,480	9,580	4,100
25-29	3,560	6,065	2,505
30-34	2,435	4,025	1,590
35-39	2,350	3,680	1,330
40-44	2,305	3,655	1,350
45-49	2,090	3,185	1,095
50-54	1,970	2,760	790
55-59	1,675	2,245	570
60 and over	185	285	100
All ages	24,768	39,581	14,813

Notes: The numbers of claimants in age groups are rounded to the nearest 5, while the total for all ages is not rounded, hence figures do not sum.
Figures in both tables are not seasonally adjusted.

Gender	Number of Claimants - April 2008	Number of Claimants - January 2009	Net Change
Male	19,377	31,571	12,194
Female	5,391	8,010	2,619
Total	24,768	39,581	14,813

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if the proposed siting of a telehouse in Coleraine is subject to state aid. (AQW 5359/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The telehouse is part of Project Kelvin which is part funded through the INTERREG IVA programme. The project received State Aid approval.

European Commission Document of State Aid Approval

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if the terms Derry and Londonderry were specifically described, on page 2 of the European Commission document of state aid approval, (Brussels, 8.X.2008, C(2008)5610 final), as meaning the City of Derry/Londonderry, and to confirm that the document does not specify the terms as referring to the County of Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5361/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The UK application for state aid approval was made for the INTERREG IVA region.

The footnote on page 2 of the European Commission approval document does not say that every time the term 'Londonderry' or 'Derry' is used within the application it means the city. The footnote is stating that there are different naming conventions contained within the UK and Irish applications i.e that the UK application refers to 'Londonderry' while the Irish application refers to 'Derry'.

European Commission Document of State Aid Approval

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the statement on page 6 of the European Commission document of state aid approval, that 'Both the Irish and the UK governments have agreed that Londonderry is the most suitable location for the direct link to terminate'. (AQW 5362/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: This statement uses the language of the original state aid application and means there has to be access to the submarine cable in Londonderry.

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action his Department is taking to ensure the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry is re-instated. (AQW 5408/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The consultants appointed jointly with the Scottish Government to undertake the economic appraisal of the case for restoring the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service have issued their final report. In overall terms a restored ferry service represents poor value for money.

I have agreed to meet Scottish Ministers later this month to consider a number of policy options.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

10 Day Prompt Payment Pledge

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment if his Department and all its agencies and bodies, are complying with the 10 day prompt payment pledge. (AQW 4760/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): My Department has put certain measures in place to assist in help meeting the new 10 day target for payment of invoices. These measures, which were introduced in early December include:

- Ensuring that the certification process of invoices is initiated as early as possible;
- Taking particular care at holiday times and other times of staff absence to ensure that invoices are not left unactioned; and
- Ensuring that creditors are aware of the correct billing name and address for invoices.

Lough Cowey Reservoir

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment how many incidents of illegal dumping took place at the Lough Cowey Reservoir between January and July 2008; and to detail the (i) dates of the incidents; (ii) amount of waste dumped each time; (iii) number of test holes dug to establish the nature of the waste; and (iv) date that Lough Cowey ceased to be used as a source of public drinking water. (AQW 4880/09)

Minister of the Environment: (i) NIEA received three reports relating to one incident of illegal dumping, on 26 March 2008, 7 April 2008, and 7 July 2008; (ii) NIEA established, on investigation, that there was less than 50 tonnes of construction and demolition waste on site; (iii) no test pits were dug, because of the relatively small volume of waste involved and that fact that it was easily identifiable from a surface inspection; iv) I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that Lough Cowey ceased to be used as a source of public drinking water on 6 October 2008.

Enforcement Officers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment how many enforcement officers are employed in each Planning Office. (AQW 5055/09)

Minister of the Environment: The figures provided give details of the number of enforcement officers who are employed on Enforcement work. There are also six senior officers at PPTO (Principal Planner) grade who are involved with enforcement work combined with their other duties. They have not been included in these figures.

Divisional Office	Staff Numbers
Ballymena	5
Belfast	7
Craigavon	7
Londonderry	7
Downpatrick	6
Omagh	6

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his Department that have disabilities. (AQW 5069/09)

Minister of the Environment: Information on the number of staff who have disabilities is collected for equality monitoring purposes by the Department of Finance and Personnel, on behalf of all NICS Departments.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will therefore be responding on behalf of all Departments.

Treatment Facilities

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment what criteria is used by his Department when requiring authorised treatment facilities to pay a subsistence charge of £3,100. (AQW 5094/09)

Minister of the Environment: The level of the charge is determined by both the nature of the waste and annual throughput of the licensed facility. Authorised Treatment Facilities (ATFs) pay the £3,100 subsistence fee if:

- (i) in addition to End of Life Vehicles (which are classified as special/hazardous waste), they handle other waste streams for the purposes of recycling; and
- (ii) their annual throughput is less than 5,000 tonnes.

Under the transitional arrangements for the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, which came into operation in December 2003, an existing waste disposal licence is to be treated as a waste management licence until such time as it is modified, revoked or surrendered. Since the introduction of the ELV Regulations at the end of 2003, the Department has been requesting holders of old District Council licences for the de-pollution of ELVs to modify their licence to an ATF licence. The subsistence charge for an ATF licence holder processing only ELVs will reduce to £200 in the following financial year, representing a saving of £2,900.

Treatment Facilities

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many authorised treatment facility operators who did not hold a licence were billed for the £3,100 subsistence charge, in each of the last three years. (AQW 5095/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Department may only charge fees and annual subsistence charges for sites which have current waste management licences; it does not have the authority to bill, and has not billed unlicensed waste facilities.

Several vehicle dismantlers with old District Council issued waste disposal licences have incorrectly believed that their licenses ceased to be valid after the introduction of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations at the end of 2003. Furthermore, the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 states that old licences will continue in force until revoked, surrendered or transferred by the Department. These licence holders are therefore required to pay annual subsistence charges.

Treatment Facilities

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many authorised treatment facility operators held a valid licence when they were billed for the £3,100 subsistence charge, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 5096/09)

Minister of the Environment: In each of the last three years, the Department has billed 5 waste operators, holding valid licences, the £3,100 annual subsistence charge.

The subsistence charge of £3,100 is in relation to the recycling of up to 5,000 tonnes of special/hazardous waste including End of Life Vehicles (ELVs) and other waste streams. The charge is set to take into account the regulatory effort required to monitor and inspect this waste activity.

If a waste licence holder modifies their licence to an ATF licence solely for the de-pollution of ELVs, then the annual subsistence charge decreases to an annual subsistence charge of £200.

Treatment Facilities

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many authorised treatment facility operators will be asked to pay the £3,100 subsistence charge.

(AQW 5097/09)

Minister of the Environment: Five waste operators holding valid licences will be asked to pay the £3,100 annual subsistence charge.

The subsistence charge of £3,100 is in relation to the recycling of up to 5,000 tonnes of special/hazardous waste including End of Life Vehicles and other waste streams. The charge is set to take into account the regulatory effort required to monitor and inspect this waste activity.

Treatment Facilities

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many (i) authorised treatment facility are registered; (ii) facilities deal solely with end of life vehicles; and (iii) facilities pay the £3,100 subsistence charge.

(AQW 5098/09)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) There are currently 33 registered Authorised Treatment Facilities (ATFs).
- (ii) 24 of these facilities deal solely with end of life vehicles.
- (iii) 5 facilities pay the £3,100 subsistence charge. These facilities may hold old Council-issued licences or new ATF licences.

There will be some ATF licence holders who pay different levels of subsistence charges because of the range of waste streams (including ELVs they process) and their annual throughput. The table below sets out the different fees currently paid by various types of facility.

Facilities	Annual Subsistence Charges						
	£200	£1,400	£1,800	£2,450	£3,100	£3,950	£4,900
ATF licence (only ELVs)	24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
ATF licence (ELVs + other wastes)	N/A	1	4	1	N/A	2	1
Old disposal licence (scrapyards, ELVs, etc)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	N/A	1

Developers

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to list the names; and (ii) the subject matter of all developers taking legal action against his Department. (AQW 5107/09)

Minister of the Environment: The (i) list of names and (ii) subject matter of all developers taking legal action against my Department is set out in the table below.

Names	Subject Matter
1. Seaport Investments Limited.	Judicial review on the grounds that the Strategic Environmental Assessment undertaken for the draft Northern Area Plan 2016 is unlawful
2. Seaport (Northern Ireland) Limited	Judicial review on the grounds that the Department's 7 November 2007 non-feasibility determination in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the draft Northern Area Plan 2016 is unlawful.
3. Irwin Glenbank Ltd.	Judicial review on the grounds that the Strategic Environmental Assessment undertaken for the adopted Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries & Retail Designations Plan 2010 is unlawful.
4. Vico Kent Ltd	Judicial review on the grounds that the adoption of the Craigavon Town Centre Boundaries & Retail Designations Plan 2010 is unlawful.
5. Irwin Glenbank Ltd	Judicial review of the Department's decision to grant planning permission for a superstore at Marlborough Retail Park, Craigavon on the grounds that the Department erred in law by taking into account the Craigavon Town Centre and Retail Designations Plan 2010 as a material consideration.
6. C P Thompson	Judicial review in relation to planning application R/2005/1097 re demolition of dwelling at 45 Bryansford Village, Newcastle for Housing scheme to include 23 dwellings on the grounds that the granting of permission by Planning Service in the absence of a decision of the full Planning Service Management Board is unlawful.
7. Wilkinson/Clifford	Legal action against the Department in relation to planning application S/2002/0362 re lands to the rear of 76 Stoneyford Road for the erection of 76 dwellings. The claim relates to flooding which occurred at the dwellings occupied by the plaintiffs.
8. Seaport Ltd	Judicial review against the Department's decision not to ask the PAC to hold a hearing into the National Trust Application for visitors' Centre at Giants Causeway & to conjoin with the hearing of Seaport Ltd for which the Department has issued an Notice of opinion to refuse.
9. Elcor Resources	Legal action against planning application Z/1994/1017/O for outline planning permission to develop a petrol filling station including shop and car wash on a site between Milner Street and the Westlink, BT12. Elcor are claiming compensation against both DoE and DRD for what they believe to be unique events which have surrounded the determination of the application.
10. Sandale Developments	Judicial review against the granting of planning permission for a replacement secondary school in Carrickmore on the grounds that the Decision is unlawful in that the Department:- 1) failed to have regard for material considerations; 2) failed to conduct any or an adequate inquiry into material considerations raised; 3) took into account an irrelevant consideration; 4) acted unreasonably and irrationally; 5) road safety; and 6) failed to conduct an adequate inquiry into the application to consider engineering works, archaeological conditions, listed building, Local Landscape Policy Area and the requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment.
11. Hetherington	Judicial Review on the grounds that as a result of his two planning applications, submitted before 16 March 2006, being made invalid and returned, PPS14 became a material consideration for his proposal when resubmitted after the cut off date.
12. Central Craigavon Ltd	Judicial Review on the transfer of Draft PPS 5 'Retailing, Town Centres & Commercial Leisure Developments' from the Department for Regional Development to the Department of the Environment.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment why his Department decided to set subsistence charges for authorised treatment facilities at £3,100; and whether this charge reflects actual costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. (AQW 5161/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Department is required to have in place a charging scheme of fees and subsistence charges sufficient to recover its costs in exercising its functions under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997 and Waste Licensing Regulations. The overall aim of the charging scheme is to provide full cost recovery for the regulation of specified waste management activities in keeping with the “polluter pays” principle.

The charges cover a wide range of activities, including inspections, follow up on non-compliances and improvement requirements, and responding to complaints.

The subsistence charge of £3,100 is in relation to the recycling of up to 5,000 tonnes of special/hazardous waste including End of Life Vehicles and other waste streams. The charge is set to take into account the regulatory effort required to monitor and inspect this waste activity.

NIEA has not revised its waste management charges since their introduction in 2004. As a result, there is currently a deficit of £53,000 and subsistence charges need to increase by 5% to reflect staff costs and regulatory effort required to undertake the increasing workload under the legislation.

The Department issued a consultation paper proposing an increase of 5% in fees and subsistence charges on 23 January 2009. This document may be viewed on

http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/review_of_waste_activities_fees_and_charges.pdf

Departmental Staff

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of his Department’s staff have received formal training on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. (AQW 5177/09)

Minister of the Environment: At 1 February 2009 the Department has 3114 staff in post, of whom 788 (25%) have received formal training in Section 75.

Planning Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been lodged with the Planning Service for (i) three or more years, (ii) four or more years and (iii) five or more years, without a determination. (AQW 5212/09)

Minister of the Environment: The number of applications in the planning system awaiting a determination by my Department for 3 or more years, 4 or more years and 5 or more years at 30 September 2008 are as follows:

NUMBER OF OUTSTANDING PLANNING APPLICATIONS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2008

3 or more years	505
4 or more years	265
5 or more years	167

The figure for 3 or more years includes the figures for 4 or more years and 5 or more years. The figure for 4 or more years includes the figure for 5 or more years.

Planning Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many enforcement cases (i) have been lodged; and (ii) were cleared, in each of the Planning Service Divisions, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5213/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is not able to provide the requested figures on a year by year basis for each of the Planning Service Divisions. To provide accurate figures for the information requested can be done by a manual search of our records but would incur disproportionate costs. Work is ongoing and nearing completion to provide an upgrade of the current system of electronic data retrieval - 20/20- to allow for more accurate recording and monitoring of information relating to enforcement.

I am able to provide a total number of enforcement cases opened and closed by each Planning Service Division in the last 5 years which are as follows.

Division	Cases Opened	Cases Closed
Planning HQ	1433	984
Belfast	3511	3338
Ballymena	2857	2320
Northern	2924	2393
Downpatrick	3520	2412
Craigavon	2762	1332
Omagh	2505	2041

Planning Applications

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer AQW 4026/09, if the cost of returned planning applications could be recorded and monitored for potential monetary savings. (AQW 5215/09)

Minister of the Environment: One of the main aims of the introduction of the invalids system was to improve the quality/completeness of applications submitted. Evidence would suggest that the number of invalids being returned has significantly decreased this year and with the release of Pandarus, which includes the introduction of the new fee calculator, we should see a significant improvement in both the quality and accuracy of applications which should result in a significant decrease in the numbers returned.

It would therefore not be cost effective to introduce a new system to record the cost of returning invalid applications when the numbers are decreasing and subsequently so is the cost of returning them.

PPS21 Applications

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the refusal (deferral) reasons of all draft PPS21 applications to date, broken down by Divisional Planning Office. (AQW 5260/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently considering reassessment of deferred and new draft PPS 21 applications. It was agreed through an action plan that approvals would issue first with lesser priority given to potential refusal applications and re-consultation with Council would be held until after the public consultation period.

Deferred applications are being reconsidered by application type and date received e.g. replacement dwellings, off site replacements, dwellings on farms, special circumstances cases. Where appropriate, Divisional offices are contacting applicants to determine whether any additional information is necessary to enable full assessment of the proposal under draft PPS21.

No refusals have been taken to Council to date and an initial indication of the reasons for potential refusals include:

- (a) applications which still do not meet the dPPS21 replacement policy including proposed replacement of vernacular buildings or where the new dwelling is to be built on a site which does not comply with planning policy;
- (b) a new house on a farm which is not on a site which is visually linked or sited to cluster with an established group of buildings on a farm;

- (c) the site does not comply with the policies for integration and design of buildings in the countryside or would cause a detrimental change to the rural character of an area;
- (d) the proposed dwelling does not fall within the scope of the categories identified in policy CTY 1, ie, it is not:
- a replacement dwelling in accordance with Policy CTY 3;
 - a dwelling based on special personal or domestic circumstances in accordance with Policy CTY 6;
 - a dwelling to meet the essential needs of a non-agricultural business enterprise in accordance with Policy CTY 7;
 - the development of a small gap site within an otherwise substantial and continuously built up frontage in accordance with Policy CTY 8; or
 - a dwelling on a farm in accordance with Policy CTY 10.

Domestic Solar Panels

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to exempt domestic solar panels from requiring planning permission. (AQW 5265/09)

Minister of the Environment: Solar panels fitted to the wall or roof of a dwellinghouse and complying with the requirements of Classes A and B of Part 1, Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 are already permitted development, as are solar panels fitted to other buildings within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse complying with Class D of Part 1. However, I propose to bring forward legislation providing specific permitted development rights for solar panels, including standalone equipment within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse, later this year.

Vehicle Tax Bands

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars does his Department or its agencies own, broken down by vehicle tax bands. (AQW 5287/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department owns 79 cars, which I have interpreted as any vehicle designed to carry passengers, more specifically those vehicles which have a back seat. The cars are owned by two agencies within my Department, the Driver and Vehicle Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, and include a number of four wheel drive and people carrier style vehicles.

A break down by vehicle tax band is set out in the table below. Only 77 vehicles are included as two of the cars owned were manufactured before 2001 and would therefore be taxed based on engine size rather than emission levels.

Tax Band	Number of Cars Owned
Heavy Goods Vehicle Band A	4
Light Goods Vehicle	44
Private Light Goods Vehicle	10
Band D	5
Band E	4
Band F	10
Total	77

Domestic Rate for Local Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the domestic rate for each of the local councils, for the financial year 2009/10. (AQW 5340/09)

Minister of the Environment: The domestic rate and the non-domestic rate for each of the local councils are set out in the table below.

District Council	Non-Domestic Rate Pence	Domestic Rate Pence
Antrim	25.5261	0.3404
Ards	21.6090	0.2617
Armagh	26.9256	0.3628
Ballymena	24.2151	0.3345
Ballymoney	24.1347	0.3097
Banbridge	24.4075	0.3244
Belfast	23.7325	0.2717
Carrickfergus	25.2222	0.3450
Castlereagh	15.8221	0.1902
Coleraine	21.3192	0.2812
Cookstown	21.0292	0.2663
Craigavon	23.0338	0.3576
Derry	25.8003	0.3730
Down	23.7441	0.3143
Dungannon and South Tyrone	20.8161	0.2542
Fermanagh	17.0713	0.2357
Larne	22.4881	0.3318
Limavady	25.6732	0.3750
Lisburn	18.1180	0.2374
Magherafelt	18.5751	0.2344
Moyle	30.3867	0.3749
Newry and Mourne	21.8891	0.2992
Newtownabbey	23.8808	0.3057
North Down	19.2253	0.2598
Omagh	21.8609	0.3553
Strabane	22.8741	0.3361

Non-Domestic Rate for Local Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the non-domestic rate for each of the local councils, in the financial year 2009/10. (AQW 5341/09)

Minister of the Environment: The domestic rate and the non-domestic rate for each of the local councils are set out in the table below.

District Council	Non-Domestic Rate Pence	Domestic Rate Pence
Antrim	25.5261	0.3404
Ards	21.6090	0.2617
Armagh	26.9256	0.3628
Ballymena	24.2151	0.3345
Ballymoney	24.1347	0.3097

District Council	Non-Domestic Rate Pence	Domestic Rate Pence
Banbridge	24.4075	0.3244
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Down	23.7441	0.3143
Dungannon and South Tyrone	20.8161	0.2542
Fermanagh	17.0713	0.2357
Larne	22.4881	0.3318
Limavady	25.6732	0.3750
Lisburn	18.1180	0.2374
Magherafelt	18.5751	0.2344
Moyle	30.3867	0.3749
Newry and Mourne	21.8891	0.2992
Newtownabbey	23.8808	0.3057
North Down	19.2253	0.2598
Omagh	21.8609	0.3553
Strabane	22.8741	0.3361

Planning Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the backlog of applications in Planning Service in the Craigavon Section Office. (AQW 5350/09)

Minister of the Environment: There is no backlog of planning applications in the Craigavon Planning Office as all applications are being assessed or reconsidered including draft PPS 14 deferrals.

Published statistical information for applications being processed at 30 September 2008 in the Official Statistical publication is shown in the attached table.

NO OF CURRENT APPLICATIONS IN CRAIGAVON DIVISION PUBLISHED AT 30/09/2008

Armagh	723
Banbridge	453
Craigavon	529
Newry & Mourne	1555
Divisional Total	3260

A further update of published figures to 31 December 2008 is due on 20 March 2009.

Economic Development

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much money was spent on economic development by each local council, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5412/09)

Minister of the Environment: The gross expenditure on economic development by each district council has been extracted from councils' certified accounts, for each of the last five years. The figures are summarised in the table below.

District Council	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £
Antrim	709,622	892,245	477,497	416,380	475,730
Ards	589,466	486,267	473,367	867,970	598,435
Armagh	350,221	572,808	506,043	481,038	776,300
Ballymena	721,358	699,758	750,739	728,374	546,934
Ballymoney	267,462	313,818	350,617	276,045	312,589
Banbridge	683,699	702,068	583,029	640,946	715,828
Belfast	2,878,741	4,547,412	5,103,699	6,710,346	7,638,524
Carrickfergus	273,492	349,913	289,091	293,764	374,999
Castlereagh	96,875	214,312	227,412	178,652	197,554
Coleraine	421,995	528,352	614,373	569,570	674,023
Cookstown	419,788	312,486	441,526	506,088	539,253
Craigavon	1,062,420	943,150	1,016,069	1,053,062	1,284,704
Derry	1,512,506	1,378,035	2,058,095	3,897,071	3,157,519
Down	510,085	712,088	525,835	556,154	597,916
Dungannon and South Tyrone	718,965	968,509	1,384,453	1,226,874	1,377,777
Fermanagh	542,502	528,029	493,374	453,732	601,934
Larne	336,083	208,468	188,461	180,845	245,466
Limavady	367,535	460,961	467,125	242,512	419,636
Lisburn	1,075,034	1,002,970	833,160	1,067,552	951,195
Magherafelt	266,315	171,169	243,984	394,489	309,936
Moyle	372,938	328,413	267,836	314,990	307,135
Newry and Mourne	1,101,772	715,911	647,847	517,529	643,012
Newtownabbey	490,012	783,192	543,382	652,713	676,801
North Down	659,500	1,007,096	849,987	867,988	949,781
Omagh	1,588,623	2,163,708	1,548,228	1,300,063	1,130,912
Strabane	237,978	247,129	342,503	320,284	879,373
Total	18,254,987	21,238,267	21,227,732	24,715,031	26,383,266

Oil Plume

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to the oil plume off the east coast of Ireland, what contact he has had with the Irish coast guards and his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland government. (AQW 5443/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has had discussions with both the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the Irish Coast Guard regarding the spill off the south coast of Ireland. It is the role of the MCA to liaise with the local authorities in relation to this incident, including the Republic of Ireland government.

Oil Plume

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to the oil plume off the east coast of Ireland, what precautions has his Department taken to protect the coastline of Down and Antrim. (AQW 5445/09)

Minister of the Environment: In relation to the oil spill off the south coast of Ireland, computer modelling has been carried out which has shown that there is no predicted impact for the Northern Ireland coastline. Contact will be maintained with the relevant authorities to keep the situation under review.

Oil Plume

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to the oil plume off the east coast of Ireland, what are the risks to wildlife and marine habitats, in the (i) short term; and (ii) long-term, including Dundrum Bay Newcastle. (AQW 5447/09)

Minister of the Environment: Computer modelling of the oil spill off the south coast of Ireland has been carried out and current predictions show that there is no perceived risk to wildlife and marine habitats in Northern Ireland. The situation will be kept under review by the relevant authorities.

Act on CO2 Campaign

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the reasons why he stopped a UK government TV advert from being broadcast; and if the topic of the advert was a devolved matter. (AQW 5483/09)

Minister of the Environment: Environmental protection and climate change issues are transferred matters and I consider that, for transferred matters, Northern Ireland Ministers should have the right to decide how to promote Government policy. My decision not to use the Act on CO2 campaign was based on this fundamental constitutional principle. Communication on a transferred matter is the responsibility of the devolved Minister.

Planning Service

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of the Environment in relation to the Planning Service Management Board's referral process from Councils, (i) what was its policy for conducting meetings with; and (ii) to detail the meetings with, (a) applicants; (b) agents; (c) opponents; and (d) interested parties, to discuss planning applications, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5485/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Management Board Referral process is part of the consultation arrangements operated for Councils in considering the Department's preliminary opinion on the outcome of planning applications. The Council as part of the process is afforded the option of a meeting.

Third party attendance at any meeting with a representative of the Management Board or other Headquarters staff is only agreed if this forms part of the Council delegation.

My Department does not record centrally the number of meetings held in relation to MBRs. This could only be provided by a manual check of a large number of files at a disproportionate time and cost and could not be provided within the timescale requested.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Programme for Government Targets

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what risk assessment he has carried out on the Programme for Government targets. (AQW 4827/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The Department has lead responsibility for targets within PSA 11 Driving Investment and Sustainable Development, PSA 20 Improving Public Services and PSA 21 Enabling Efficient Government. The Department has a 'Policy and Framework for Risk Management' in place which describes the process for identifying and managing risk within the Department. The PSA targets for which the Department is directly responsible are subject to ongoing risk assessment and, where appropriate, risks are reflected in the Department's Corporate Risk Register.

Risks are managed at three levels; Corporate (DFP), Directorate (Business Area) and Divisional level.

Programme and project risks also exist and will usually be managed within the methodology used to manage the Programme or Project by way of a project management methodology, for example, PRINCE2 and Gateway process.

Where a risk owner identifies a high level risk which could have a major impact on the Department's business objectives these risks are managed primarily by the Departmental Board in conjunction with Core Directors and Agency Chief Executives, and are subject to challenge by the Departmental Audit and Risk Committee.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in (a) his Department; and (b) the Civil Service, that have disabilities. (AQW 5068/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Information on the number of staff who have disabilities is collected for equality monitoring purposes by Central Personnel Group (CPG) in the Department of Finance and Personnel, on behalf of all departments.

The purpose of collecting disability information is to enable the NICS to monitor the effectiveness of NICS equality and personnel policies. Because these are corporate policies it is appropriate that they are monitored centrally by CPG looking at the Service as a whole. The further processing of NICS monitoring information at the level of department, directorate or location would not be consistent with Data Protection principles.

Information on disability in the NICS is collected by means of a voluntary declaration by applicants and staff. At 1 October 2008, 1385 NICS staff declared that they had a disability. This represents 5.5% of those who completed the declaration.

Departmental Staff

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of his departmental staff have received formal training on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. (AQW 5176/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: 3395 staff (100%) have received either e-learning, on the job training, literature based training or a mixture of all of the above.

In addition, approximately 526 staff have received classroom based section 75 specific training. This represents 15.5% of staff.

A further 36 staff (just over 1 %) have received policy making training in the newly formed Centre for Applied Learning.

Reduction of Rates

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if there are any provisions for a reduction of rates for families that provide a 'granny flat' for elderly parents. (AQW 5181/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: There is currently no specific rates relief scheme for families that provide a 'granny flat' for elderly relatives.

The issue of rates relief for 'granny flats' is not one that emerged in any of the consultations carried out during the rating reviews and I have no plans to introduce a specific scheme at this time.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans his Department has to accommodate Civil Service staff in view of the suspension of Workplace 2010. (AQW 5382/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department remains committed to the original objectives of Workplace 2010 to provide modern, fit for purpose office accommodation. Although the Workplace 2010 PFI procurement has now been terminated we are considering alternative ways to deliver the new workplace environment. A number of procurement routes could be used ranging from conventional procurement through to more modern partnership agreements. Until alternative procurements are approved, civil servants will be accommodated in the normal way by the Department's Properties Division.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when his Department was made aware of the potential merger of the two companies bidding for the Workplace 2010 project. (AQW 5383/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department was informed of Telereal's interest in purchasing LS Trillium in late April 2008.

Following receipt of this information the Department sought to accelerate the bid receipt and evaluation timetable with a view to having commitment letters signed in July 2008. This would have allowed a preferred bidder to be announced in advance of any potential merger taking place. The accelerated evaluation process was successfully completed on time however neither bid was in a form that was acceptable to the Department and both required further negotiation. These negotiations began in July.

In early August Telereal had withdrawn their bid for LS Trillium and there was increased press speculation that Trillium would be sold to the Qatari Investment Authority.

In late September Telereal re-entered negotiations for the purchase of Trillium and were confirmed as being in exclusive talks with Land Securities by mid-October.

The Workplace 2010 procurement was suspended on 31 October 2008.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail why the Workplace 2010 project has been suspended. (AQW 5384/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Procurement activity for the Workplace 2010 contract was suspended on 31 October 2008 as a result of continuing speculation that both Workplace 2010 Bidders could come under common ownership. Additionally, the Department was keen to use the suspension to assess the impact of the changes in the property and credit markets taking place at that time.

On 20 February 2009, my Department announced that the Workplace 2010 had been terminated. This occurred when the two final bidders, Telereal and Trillium, wrote to the Department formally withdrawing their bids. They did so mainly because of the difficulty in obtaining debt finance for this type of transaction, and also because of the well publicised decline in UK property market conditions, including of course the NICS office estate.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel which companies received payments for consultancy work in relation to the Workplace 2010 proposals. (AQW 5385/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The following companies received payments for consultancy work in relation to the Workplace 2010 procurement:

Deloitte
Lovells
Drivers Jonas
Gleeds
DEGW
L'Estrange & Brett
Osborne King
Future @ Work
BIC Systems
Delta RAC Design
EC Harris LLP
Construction Industry Co
PA Consulting
OGC Accounting Services
Partnerships UK
Denise Wheatley Associates
Evolve
Goldblatt McGuigan
Pentagon Solutions

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of his current policies and practices; and (ii) what changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to his Department's responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn. (AQW 5403/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: My December Monitoring Statement made clear the need to prioritise resources towards alleviating cost burdens on local households and businesses. Such re-prioritisation of resources has allowed me to introduce rate reliefs, financial assistance to fuel poor households and accelerated capital spending to assist the struggling local construction sector.

I will continue to ensure that resource allocation decisions are focussed on addressing the adverse effects of the economic downturn. I am also determined to ensure that public sector interventions assist in improving our competitiveness, which will allow us to take advantage when global economic conditions improve.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much was spent by his Department on consultancy fees for the Workplace 2010 project. (AQW 5458/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: DFP incurred costs of £8.16m on legal, commercial, financial and technical consultancy and other professional fees in relation to the Workplace 2010 procurement. These costs were incurred over a 4 year period from 2005 to present.

Approximately 45% of this work remains of value to the Department.

Workplace 2010 Project

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel on what date was a review initiated on Workplace 2010; and when are the recommendations expected. (AQW 5473/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: A review of the Workplace 2010 procurement was initiated following the suspension of the procurement process on 31st October 2008.

This review culminated in the announcement of the termination of the procurement on 20th February 2009.

Equity Release Scheme

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what the date was of; and (ii) who participated in, the discussion, about the suggestion of an 'Equity Release Scheme', with the UK Treasury Department. (AQW 5506/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of its role in terms of the management of public expenditure on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive there is regular and ongoing engagement between officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel and HM Treasury regarding a wide range of issues.

Although it was felt that submitting this proposal at a formal meeting with the Treasury would not be appropriate, it has been raised as part of informal discussions between officials. In response, Treasury officials have clearly indicated that the proposed scheme would not be acceptable to the Treasury.

European Grant Monies

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the clawback of European grant monies, distributed by various Departments, will have on future EU funding to Departments. (AQO 2151/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The decommitments or clawback of Northern Ireland EU funding currently being proposed by the European Commission are in respect of the 1994-99 Programmes. I would emphasise that the amounts published by the European Commission late last year remain under discussion and I would expect them to be significantly reduced. Under the public expenditure rules that apply for the 1994-99 period there would be no impact on future EU funding to Northern Ireland departments.

Performance and Delivery Unit

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what work is being undertaken by the Performance and Delivery Unit and what work is planned. (AQO 2152/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Following the successful completion of the delivery review of Planning Service in November 2008, it was agreed that a meeting should be arranged in April to allow myself and Minister Wilson to be briefed on both the progress and the impact of the Action Plan's implementation. It was also agreed that, in the interim, PEDU would make a follow up visit during February to assess the progress to date on the implementation of the action plan produced by Planning Service. Currently PEDU are undertaking this follow up – the purpose of which is to help maintain momentum and urgency around the implementation of improvements to the service's performance.

PEDU also continues to lead my Department's work on the establishment of a robust Performance Management and Monitoring system, to drive the delivery of the commitments and targets that the Departments signed up to when they secured funding in the budget. A further round of PSA monitoring has just taken place and the Unit will be making an assessment of progress to date – if necessary highlighting any areas where there is emerging evidence of potential delivery problems.

Capital Projects

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many capital projects will now proceed outside the framework agreements and to provide the total value of these projects. (AQO 2153/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In my statement to the Assembly on 15 December 2008 I announced that no construction projects will be stopped due to the legal proceedings into the use of framework agreements by the Central Procurement Directorate and the Department of Education.

As a result of this, 22 projects worth a total value in excess of £115m, scheduled to be delivered by the framework agreements, will go to the market place on a project-by-project basis before the end of this financial year. These include Lurgan and Portadown Public Realm project at £7.8m and 10 schools including St Colman's Primary School Lambeg and Magherfelt Primary School.

As you are aware, the legal cases against the Central Procurement Directorate and Department of Education frameworks agreements are on-going. Until such times as the legal proceedings are concluded, Department of Education projects and those for which the Central Procurement Directorate acts as the Centre of Procurement Expertise, will continue to be delivered on a project-by-project basis.

Those Departments not affected by the legal challenges will continue to deliver projects through use of their established procurement strategies.

Northern Ireland Economic Strategy

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the draft Northern Ireland Economic Strategy. (AQO 2154/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Obviously the economy is in a state of significant turmoil at this time. Therefore it is important to differentiate between short term policy responses to the downturn, such as those announced by the Executive in December, and the need for a longer term, more strategic economic plan for Northern Ireland.

Work is continuing on developing this longer term plan. This work will embrace key work-streams underway in other departments with an important influence on economic development.

One important example of this is the strategic review of economic development policy announced by my colleague the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This particular review, led by Professor Richard Barnett, will include an assessment of the functions of Invest NI, which clearly has a central role to play in our longer-term economic plan. It would be rather foolish to rush ahead with an economic masterplan that did not factor in the findings of this key DETI study.

Ministers Counterparts in Scotland and Wales

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had, or intends to have, with his counterparts in Scotland and Wales. (AQO 2155/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have recently met with my counterparts from Scotland and Wales on 21 January 2009, when we discussed a broad range of issues including the response to date by our respective administrations to the downturn in economic conditions.

It was clear that there is a significant degree of commonality in the actions taken to date to alleviate hardship for those worst affected by the downturn.

Arrangements are currently being put in place for a UK Finance Ministers Quadrilateral with the three Devolved Administrations and the Treasury, which will provide a further opportunity to discuss matters of common concern.

Workplace 2010

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment as to whether the problems identified in the public procurement process for the Workplace 2010 private finance initiative (PFI) demonstrate inherent weaknesses in PFI policy in relation to public sector projects. (AQO 2156/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The problems for the Workplace 2010 procurement are not due to an inherent weakness in PFI policy. They are simply the result of a significant decline in property prices, including the value of the NICS office estate, as well as the unprecedented global financial turmoil, which has made it very difficult for bidders to secure funding for property-related PFI deals. The Executive is committed to managing this impact and ensuring that the taxpayer always achieves value for money by using the most appropriate procurement route for each individual project. .

Rating Pressures

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action he has taken to address the financial difficulties being faced by district councils due to rating pressures. (AQO 2157/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have already announced a package of assistance for councils. This will be worth up to £8m in the next financial year and comprises three key elements. It will allow councils, where they are in a general repayment situation, to offset this amount through staging any repayments arising from reductions in British Telecom and Ministry of Defence valuations over five years. This will result in a benefit for all councils of up to £3.3m next year.

The way in which councils net revenues are calculated will also be changed, providing a benefit of up to £4m. The 3% cost attributable to housing benefit will be removed. I will also reduce the impact of the landlord allowance on councils, for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties, for two years, pending a review of this allowance prior to the introduction of the rating of empty homes.

Finally, there will be a one off reduction in the cost of collection to ensure that some of the additional costs associated with the development of new IT systems are not passed on to councils.

I believe that this package, of up to £8m, is a proportionate and affordable response to the financial difficulties that some councils are experiencing at this time. Indeed, it has enabled councils to strike much lower rates than would otherwise have been the case. As you will no doubt be aware many councils have been able to strike rate increases at 5% or below. The effect of the regional rate freeze will to be halve these increases, for both households and businesses, meaning that rate bill increases for many will be much lower.

Land and Property Services

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he will take to increase co-operation between the Land and Property Services and local councils. (AQO 2158/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services works closely with local councils, recognising that councils are a key stakeholder for the Agency. The overall relationship is managed by a Strategic Steering Group that includes representatives of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, the Association of Local Government Finance Officers, Building Control Officers, IT Officers and the Rating Policy Division of DFP.

A number of other, more specific, liaison arrangements also exist, for instance a Penny Product Working Group involving Land & Property Services, the Association of Local Government Finance Officers, DFP Rating Policy Division and Local Government Policy Division of the Department of the Environment. This group was set up in 2007 and meets on a regular basis to discuss issues connected with the Penny Product.

Current issues being progressed between local councils and Land & Property Services include the maintenance and improvement of Pointer, the definitive address database for Northern Ireland; the inspection exercise of vacant properties; and further refinement of the process of estimating and calculating the rating Penny Product. Land & Property Services also continues to provide a comprehensive property valuation service which includes asset valuations, rental, acquisitions, and general property advice to the majority of councils.

In addition, a wide range of specific questions are also raised and resolved between local councils and Land & Property Services on a daily basis.

Fiscal Stimulus

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the fiscal stimulus offered by the Executive in comparison to initiatives being taken in other UK regions. (AQO 2159/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive announced a range of measures in December to help alleviate some of the economic pressures confronting the local economy. While we have few fiscal instruments at our discretion, we must seek to utilise all our available powers to reduce living cost pressures confronting households and businesses. That is why the Executive agreed a range of measures such as rate reliefs, financial assistance to fuel poor households and accelerated capital spending to assist the struggling local construction sector.

When I met recently with the Scottish and Welsh finance ministers to discuss the economic downturn, it was clear that our individual policy

responses were very similar in nature. The key priority across our regions was to alleviate living cost pressures and boost capital spending.

Vacant Properties

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many vacant properties have been identified as being occupied; and how many of these have been sent bills. (AQO 2161/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services is working in partnership with local authorities to inspect properties recorded as vacant, or with insufficient ratepayer details, and to confirm the current occupancy status of each. To date just over 50,000 inspection forms have been returned by local councils. Of these, 13,000 confirmed the property as vacant, 3,500 contained full information for raising a bill, 6,500 required follow up action such as a valuation adjustment, and 27,000 required further information before a bill could be issued.

Land & Property Services has, at 11 February 2009, issued 5,796 rate bills as a result of the vacancy inspection exercise, with a total value of £8.9 million. The Agency has applied more than 25 staff to completing the exercise, with the key focus at the moment being gathering the missing information required before a bill can be issued.

It is important to stress that no money has been lost to Councils or the Executive as a result of the backlog of vacancy inspections – Land & Property Services will ensure that bills are raised for all occupied properties that were recorded as vacant, and will pursue payment of the rates due.

Land and Property Services

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the collection of outstanding rates by Land and Property Services distinguishing between amounts arising from the current year and from previous years. (AQO 2162/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 8 February 2009 the ratepayer debt of £124 million at 31 March 2008 had been reduced to £62 million. Between 1 April 2008 and 31 December 2008, Land & Property Services continued to pursue this debt, and also the in-year ratepayer arrears, and issued:

- 114,000 final notices;
- 42,000 court processes, and
- 11,824 Notices of Intention to Enforce Debt.

Land & Property Services continues to pursue ratepayers for all outstanding ratepayer debt, including in-year ratepayer arrears, while at the same time seeking to agree payment arrangements with individuals who are encountering difficulties in making payments and ensuring that they have taken up any benefits and reliefs to which they are entitled.

It is difficult to quantify in-year ratepayer rate arrears given that – as part of normal activity – bills are issued on a daily basis. Arrears for the 2008-09 year will therefore not be known with certainty until the Statement of Rate Levy and Collection is completed in May 2009.

The collection of all ratepayer debt remains a very high priority area of work for Land & Property Services. The Agency, however, recognises that the current economic climate makes debt recovery more demanding.

Economic Downturn

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has held with HM Treasury in relation to raising additional finance to help combat the economic downturn. (AQO 2163/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have regular discussions with Treasury Ministers on a range of finance issues affecting Northern Ireland. During these discussions I have continually impressed upon them the need to ensure that we receive our appropriate share of all public expenditure measures related to the economic downturn. I have also stressed the need to ensure that the various assistance packages announced recently apply fully to Northern Ireland. This is particularly important with respect to our local banks, which need to participate fully in proactively assisting our local businesses in terms of greater liquidity, cashflow and export credit insurance.

Land and Property Services

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the method by which the Land and Property Services is collecting rate arrears. (AQO 2164/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services is responsible for collecting rate income which, as members will be aware, is vital for the funding of local council and Executive activity. It is important that each rate payer contributes in an equitable manner to the cost of these services. Land & Property Services is responsible for the operation of the valuation and rate collection process, including the recovery of debt and administration of a range of reliefs and benefits.

Land & Property Services provides rate payers with a number of opportunities to pay their rate bills, or to put in place a mutually-agreeable payment arrangement. If payment, or a payment arrangement, is not forthcoming, Land & Property Services will use the court process to attempt to collect the debt, or to enforce the judgement of the Court against the rate payer.

A final demand is sent 35 days after issue of a rate bill. If no contact is received from the rate payer within 10 days, Land & Property Services will commence court proceedings. Rate payers can stop the process by paying – or agreeing a payment arrangement – at any time prior to the Court hearing and, in line with normal Court proceedings, can contest the case and appeal the verdict of the Court. If a decree is awarded in favour of Land & Property Services by the Court, a Notice of Intention to Enforce the Debt will be issued, and Land & Property Services will then pass the matter to the Enforcement of Judgements office.

The process differs slightly if a rate payer pays by direct debit. The Finance and Personnel Committee of this Assembly has been provided with a detailed flowchart of the processes that apply.

Rate Arrears

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of the recession on the reduction of rate arrears. (AQO 2165/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At 8 February 2009 the ratepayer debt of £124 million at 31 March 2008 had been reduced to £62 million. The profile of the collection of this debt over the course of 2008 makes interesting reading – there is a steady decline in the collection of the debt outstanding at 31 March, from 8.2% in April to 3.0% in December. There is no doubt that the recession is making the reduction of ratepayer arrears more difficult.

A number of businesses have been affected by the economic situation and have entered into administration. The annual rates bills of Woolworths, Land of Leather and MFI combined are – or perhaps I should say were – £1.64 million. LPS therefore expects to write off £5 million of rating debt in 2008-09, considerably more than in previous years. Land & Property Services writes debt off only after exploring all possible avenues for recovering the money.

Land & Property Services will continue robustly to pursue the recovery of all rating debt.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY**Health Service Dental Treatment**

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why people who have served in the armed forces are deemed to have broken their Health Service agreement with their dentist. (AQW 657/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): A continuing care arrangement (e.g. registration with a dentist) lapses after a 15 month period where the patient has not seen the dentist. Members or ex-members of the armed forces are not automatically deemed to have broken their health service agreement with their dentist. However, the 15 month registration period may be an issue for military reservists whose deployment abroad means that they will not have attended their dentist within the relevant 15 month period. I am entirely sympathetic to the problems faced by those who have been absent serving their country, and who encounter such difficulties on returning home.

I propose to take measures to increase the registration period from 15 months to 24 months, not just for soldiers but for all members of the community. I am confident that this will help to address the issues raised.

In the meantime, any members of the armed forces returning to civilian life in Northern Ireland who encounter difficulties in registering with a dentist should contact the Dental Department in the relevant Health and Social Services Board, explaining their situation. The Board will be glad to offer advice and assistance wherever possible.

Health Service Dental Treatment

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how people retiring from the armed forces and returning to civilian life can avail of Health Service dental treatment. (AQW 658/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am wholly sympathetic to the range of issues facing people retiring from the armed forces. Access to health service dental treatment has become more problematic in recent years for all members of the community in certain parts of Northern Ireland, and not just retired service personnel.

In my view the resolution to this problem for all members of the community is to improve access generally to health service dentistry. In this regard my Department is taking all necessary steps to increase health service provision in the most expedient ways possible.

Negotiations are currently taking place between officials and the Dental Practice Committee of the British Dental Association on a new contract for Northern Ireland, which we hope will ensure increased health service access. In addition, I have authorised tender action which will increase the number of dentists providing health service dentistry. I expect a contract to be awarded by the Spring, and expect to see additional dentists, in those areas where we currently have access difficulties, by the Autumn.

In the meantime, any members of the armed forces returning to civilian life in Northern Ireland who encounter difficulties in registering with a dentist should contact the Dental Department in the relevant Health and Social Services Board. The Board will be glad to offer advice and assistance wherever possible.

Hospital Travel Cost Scheme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have benefited from the Hospital Travel Cost Scheme, broken down by Health and Social Care Trusts, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4941/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The systems operated in Trust facilities do not hold the information in the format requested.

The information asked for could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Hospital Travel Cost Scheme

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to review the Hospital Travel Cost Scheme to include patients with cancer. (AQW 4942/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Hospital Travel Cost Scheme is entirely income based and help from that scheme is available to those on specified social security benefits or on low income. Similar schemes operate in England, Scotland and Wales.

As assistance with the cost of travel to hospital appointments is available to the vast majority of those people who need it, I have no plans to review the current scheme.

In May last year, in recognition of the need for cancer patients to attend frequently for chemotherapy or radiotherapy I announced that these patients will not pay car parking fees

Health and Social Care Trust Staff

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to break down by Health and Social Care Trust how many sick days were taken by his staff in the last financial year. (AQW 4965/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on number of sick days taken by HSC staff is not collected centrally and has therefore been supplied by individual Health and Social Care Trusts.

Health and Social Care Trust	Number of sick days 07/08
Northern	146,655
Southern	113,198
South Eastern	140,720
Belfast	283,888
Western	123,700
NI Ambulance Service*	n/a

* As NI Ambulance operates a 24 hour service, sickness absence data is captured as 'hours lost' rather than 'days'. The total hours lost for the same period above was 162258.51

My Department monitors sickness absence rates in HSC Trusts on a bi-annual basis and I have set a target for reduction in sickness absence in my 'Priorities for Action 2008/09'. Each Trust should ensure that, during 2008-09, levels of absenteeism are reduced to 10% below average 2007-08 levels, working towards a regional target of 5.2% in 2010-11.

Health and Social Care Trust Staff

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people work for each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4966/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of staff employed by Health and Social Care Trust can be found in the latest Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Key Facts Workforce Bulletin as at 31st December 2008, which is on the DHSSPS website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/key_facts_workforce_bulletin_dec_2008_web.pdf

Health and Social Care Trust Staff

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent on salaries in each Health and Social Care Trust, over the last financial year. (AQW 4967/09)

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

TABLE 1: STAFF COSTS BY HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE TRUST (1 APRIL 2007 – 31 MARCH 2008)

HSC Organisation	Cost (£)
Belfast HSC Trust	584,317,897
Northern HSC Trust	300,177,532
South Eastern HSC Trust	232,509,195
Southern HSC Trust	250,762,751
Western HSC Trust	253,794,676
Regional Services & Board HQ	106,847,156
Total	1,728,409,207

Source: Quarterly Cost Analysis (QCA) – March 2008

Notes:

1. These cost figures include costs for Bank staff (who are normally removed from published Human Resource Management System (HRMS) workforce figures due to the variable nature of their employment). The costs of other staff who may have left the Health service during the year will also be included. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to compare these costs with published, point-in-time, staffing data from HRMS.
2. Figures in the QCA are derived from Organisations' payroll systems and are centrally collated by Directorate of Information Systems (DIS).
3. The cost of staff is the total employees' gross taxable pay plus employers' National Insurance and Superannuation contributions. Items which are not reckonable for Income Tax have been excluded, for example, travelling expenses, subsistence, uniform allowances, since they are not charged to payroll headings despite the payroll system being used to effect payment.

A&E Departments

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were treated for knife wounds, at each A&E Department, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4976/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people treated for knife wounds at each A&E Department in each of the last five years is unavailable.

Meetings with MEPs

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many meetings he has had with each of the three MEPs from 2007 to date. (AQW 4981/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can advise that since taking up office on 8 May 2007 I have not held any departmental meetings with any of the MEPs.

Translation Services

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what was the total cost incurred by (i) his Department (ii) General Practitioners and hospitals; and the hourly rate paid to interpreters, for translation services for residents from foreign countries, in each of the last two financial years. (AQW 5022/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department funds the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Interpreting Service at a cost of £164,000 per year. In addition, it spent £12,908 in 2006/07 and £4,351 in 2007/08 on Departmental translation services for ethnic minority languages.

Information relating to the specific cost of translation services for general practitioners and hospitals is not available.

The hourly rate for interpreters engaged by the Health and Social Care Interpreting Service is £25 for the first hour and £20 per hour thereafter. Where external interpreting services need to be engaged (for example because of demand), higher charges can apply. No average rate is available.

Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people used the Genito-Urinary Medicine clinics, broken down by month, over the last five years. (AQW 5060/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people who use GUM clinics is not collected monthly. Outpatient attendances at GUM clinics in Health and Social Care hospitals in Northern Ireland for each quarter in the last five years are shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	New Outpatient Attendances	Review Outpatient Attendances	Total Outpatient Attendances
30-Jun-03	2,950	3,408	6,358
30-Sep-03	2,910	3,482	6,392
31-Dec-03	2,976	3,339	6,315
31-Mar-04	2,900	3,634	6,534
30-Jun-04	2,703	3,724	6,427
30-Sep-04	2,914	3,144	6,058
31-Dec-04	2,904	3,726	6,630
31-Mar-05	3,521	3,201	6,722
30-Jun-05	3,799	3,223	7,022
30-Sep-05	3,625	2,601	6,226
31-Dec-05	3,653	2,752	6,405
31-Mar-06	3,658	2,682	6,340
30-Jun-06	3,849	2,760	6,609
30-Sep-06	2,851	2,552	5,403
31-Dec-06	2,960	2,602	5,562
31-Mar-07	2,972	2,352	5,324
30-Jun-07	3,077	2,411	5,488
30-Sep-07	3,337	2,163	5,500
31-Dec-07	3,171	2,387	5,558
31-Mar-08	3,529	2,693	6,222

Source: Departmental KH09 (Part 1) Return

Nursing Staff

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the proposed reduction in nursing staff in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 5065/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Proposals for the planned efficiency savings put forward by HSC Trusts are just that and should not be read as the final position. Over recent months each of the Trusts have been consulting on their respective key proposals. It is only after this period of consultation is over and final decisions are made that I will be in a position to provide you with this level of detail.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of employees in his Department that have disabilities. (AQW 5071/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of staff who have disabilities is collected for equality monitoring purposes by the Department of Finance and Personnel, on behalf of all NICS Departments.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will therefore be responding on behalf of all Departments.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the amount of funding; and (ii) the name of groups that have received funding, from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5078/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The amount of funding provided by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to voluntary and community groups, senior citizen groups and playgroups during 2007/2008 totalled £6,688,737.

A list of the groups that received funding during 2007/2008 and the amount of grant aided is attached.

NHSCT GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

	£
Accord - Belfast	12,838
Action Mental Health	219,313
Alzheimer's Disease Society	6,959
Autism Initiative	16,075
Barnardo's - Leaving Care	77,101
Barnardo's - Special Support	51,996
Barnardo's - Young Carers	75,152
Blind Centre	64,368
Bridge Association	222,875
Carlisle House	192,071
Chest, Heart & Stroke Association	17,640
Childline N.I.	37,348
Cruse Bereavement Care N.I.	16,705
Disability Action	55,126
Extern Organisation	1,063,322
Family Care Society	11,038
Family Caring Centre - Children's sponsored placements	22,215
Family Caring Centre - Mental Health	69,055
Give and Take Scheme	54,151
Homestart (Antrim)	47,753
Homestart (Carrickfergus)	49,672

	£
NCH Parental	167,278
Marie Curie (Cancer patients)	106,705
Marie Curie (Non-cancer patients)	23,413
N.I.A.M.H.	433,383
N.I.A.M.H. CBT Waiting List Initiatives	30,000
N.I.C.O.D. The Cedar Foundation	90,742
N.I.P.P.A.	64,454
N.I Hospice	300,727
Northlands	24,606
N.S.P.C.C.	114,730
Praxis	1,251,908
Positive Futures	145,787
Rehability	82,521
Rethink	161,511
Rethink - Magherafelt Training & Employment Scheme	42,120
Sense - Manor Nursery	23,194
Triangle Women's Association	231,404
Waveney Association	8,850
Women's Aid Cookstown	42,070
Women's Aid Ballymena	56,933
Alzheimer's Disease Society - Belfast	19,640
ASBAH (NI)	4,428
RNIB	42,860
Compass Advocacy	64,864
NIAMH - Shiels Court Ballymoney	148,625
Harpurs Hill Community Early Years Project	129,220
Fairways Woodward Park	161,609
Dalriada Surestart	81,001
Cedar Foundation	50,773
Chest, Heart & Stroke Association	10,506
Triangle Housing Association	3,000
Causeway Womens Aid - Coleraine	40,918
Age Concern	3,000

	£
Homestart - Causeway	17,920
YMCA - Larne	65,233
Voluntary and Community Groups	6,628,706

SENIOR CITIZENS GROUPS

	£
Age Concern, Cookstown	8,359
Antrim Retirement Group	443
Ballymena Retirement Group	390
Carnmoney Old Peoples Club	106
Glengormley Thursday Together Club	135
Kells & Connor Luncheon Club	229
Larne Retirement Association	208
Mossley Senior Citizens Club	73
Monkstown Churches Joint Committee	468
Seven Towers Senior Citizens Club	178
St.Comgall's Senior Citizens Club	246
Still Active Club, St.Patrick's Church, Ballymena	85
Templepatrick Retirement Group (NI)	288
Toome & District Senior Citizens Club	300
Toberdoney Recreation Club	99
Castlerock Senior Citizens Club	222
Macosquin Senior Citizens Club	512
Rathain Fold	126
Cramsie Crew Group	81
Articlave Young At Heart	261
Age Concern (Coleraine)	5,658
Senior Citizens Groups	18,466

PLAY GROUPS

	£
Abbey Mother & Toddler Group	480
Ahoghill Community Playgroup	563
Alphabet Playgroup	563

	£
Ballee Pre-School Playgroup	1,125
Ballee Presbyterian Church, Mothers and Toddlers	184
Ballinascreen Playgroup	1,350
Ballycarry Playgroup	567
Ballyhenry Presbyterian Church Parent & Toddler Group	248
Ballyloughan Parent & Toddler Group	486
Banana Bunch Playgroup	563
Beacon Playgroup	540
Bright Buttons Playgroup	563
Brookside Presbyterian Church Parent & Toddler Association	104
Broughshane Centre of Early Learning	562
Buddies & Bundles Parent & Toddler Group	563
Carlisle Hall Pre-School Playgroup	338
Carrickfergus Childminders Drop In Centre	351
Covenant Christian School Playgroup	563
First Larne Mother & Toddler Group	176
Galgorm & Gracehill Community Playgroup	585
Glenarm Community Playgroup	563
Glengormley Free Methodist Carers & Toddlers Group	248
Glengormley Integrated Primary School Playgroup	563
Glenravel Community Playgroup	585
Greengables Playgroup,Carrickfergus	518
Greenlough Playgroup	936
Hansel & Gretel Playgroup, Glynn	563
Happytots Comunity Playgroup	585
Harbour Bears Playgroup	563
Harryville Parent & Toddler Group	185
Hillside Pre-School Playgroup (Y.E. 30.11.06 also)	1,125
Jack & Jill Playgroup	563
Kilbride playgroup	563
Kirkinriola Early Years Playgroup	540
Lissan Cross Community Playgroup	756
Longstone Community Playgroup	405

	£
Mallusk Community Playgroup	450
Monkstown Community School Playgroup	563
Mulberry Bush Playgroup	563
Naionra Ghleann Darach	450
Noah's Ark Parent and Toddler Group	720
Playtots Mother & Toddler Group	189
Portglenone Community Playgroup	540
Rainbow Club Cairncastle Pres. Church	180
Randalstown Parent/Toddler Group	468
Randalstown Community Playgroup	563
St.Bernards Pre-School Playgroup	563
St.Mary's on The Hill Pre-School Playgroup	563
Slievegallion Playgroup	585
Taylorstown Community Playgroup	563
Tiny Tots Parent and Toddler Group,Cullybackey	157
Tiny Tots Playgroup,Kells and Conor	765
Tir Na Nog Ballyclare	563
Whitehead Tiny Tots Parent & Toddler Group	180
Woodburn Playgroup	563
Ballymoney & District Community Playgroup	882
Ballymoney Tea & Tots	117
Stepping Stones Playgroup / Coleraine	2,160
Wattfun Community Playgroup	563
Dervock Community Playgroup	540
Jack Horner Community Playgroup	540
Kilrea Community Playgroup	585
Macosquin Community Playgroup	495
See Saw Community Playgroup	585
Rasharkin Community Playgroup	338
Ballywillan Mother & Toddler Group	180
Crows Nest Community Playgroup	473
Brookvale Community Playgroup	585
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	518

	£
Castlerock Community Playgroup	563
Garvagh Community Playgroup	1,260
Cloughmills Community Playgroup	563
Dunloy Community Playgroup	360
St Colums Pre-School Playgroup	540
Ballysally Community Playgroup	450
Mother Goose Community Playgroup	360
Sub-total- Playgroups	41,565

999 Calls

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will pursue prosecutions of individuals who abuse 999 calls to the (i) Fire Brigade; or (ii) Ambulance Service. (AQW 5106/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The prosecution of those who abuse 999 calls is a matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses specialising in inflammatory bowel disease are there in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5118/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Whilst there are nurses with an interest in Inflammatory Bowel Disease employed by the Health & Social Care Trusts, there are no “specialist” nurses specifically with this remit. As part of some nurse-led clinics, Inflammatory Bowel Disease patients would be reviewed, but these would not be specific Inflammatory Bowel Disease clinics.

Gastroenterology Departments

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many dietitians are there in gastroenterology departments. (AQW 5119/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trusts have advised that there are currently 6 (2.15 whole-time equivalent) Dietitians employed specifically within their Gastroenterology Departments. Additionally, there are many more core service Dietitians who assess and advise patients with gastroenterological conditions as part of their overall medical and surgical caseload.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment has been made of the adequacy of services for inflammatory bowel disease. (AQW 5120/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has not carried out an assessment of services for people with inflammatory bowel disease. Treatment, support and advice may be provided by GPs, dieticians and hospital specialists, and will vary depending on which type of inflammatory bowel disease a patient is suffering from and the severity of their individual condition.

Inflammatory Bowel Disease

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people suffer from inflammatory bowel disease. (AQW 5121/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people who suffer from inflammatory bowel disease is unavailable.

Health Warnings

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of placing health warnings on alcohol products similar to those on tobacco. (AQW 5134/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department fully supports the voluntary labelling agreement between the UK Government and the alcohol industry. Through this agreement all alcoholic containers should contain the following key messages:

- the 'Know Your Limits' slogan or agreed alternative;
- icon showing alcohol unit content;
- the sensible drinking guidelines;
- advice on alcohol and pregnancy; and
- the Drinkaware web address.

These health messages are appropriate to the nature and level of harm associated with alcohol, which cannot be directly compared to tobacco.

I understand that a review is currently underway to establish the extent to which the alcohol industry is complying with this agreement. If this monitoring process shows that there is not significant pace of movement towards compliance, then further consideration should be given to UK wide legislation on this issue.

Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people applied for a place; and (ii) how many applications were granted for places, in Slieve Roe Residential Home, Kilkeel, in each of the last three years. (AQW 5162/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

- (i) The number of applications for places in Slieve Roe Residential Home in each of the last three years was as follows:

Year	Applications for Places
2006	7
2007	8
2008	0

- (ii) The number of applications granted for places in Slieve Roe Residential Home in each of the last three years was as follows:

Year	Applications Granted
2006	2
2007	4*
2008	0

* Two of the four applications granted during 2007 were to clients who applied to Slieve Roe in 2006 but were initially placed in another home and then subsequently transferred to Slieve Roe during 2007 when places became available.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Services

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when will he publish his plans for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis services. (AQW 5168/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Review of Adult Neurology Services in Northern Ireland (2002) and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) clinical guidelines currently form the basis for the Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) service provision here. In January 2008, my Department endorsed the NICE clinical guidelines on the diagnosis and management of ME as applicable to Northern Ireland. These guidelines are endorsed as developmental standards, and the Department expects the HSC Trusts to take account of the guidelines in their planning and delivery of services.

In addition, I am investing a total of £4.4m recurrent funding to provide for 70 additional cognitive behavioural therapists to be recruited over the next three years, which, in conjunction with DSD's Welfare Reform Programme, will significantly improve access to this therapy which is a treatment of choice for those suffering from mild to moderate ME.

MRI Scans

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people have been referred to private sector organisations for MRI scans; and (ii) what was the cost, broken down in each Health and Social Care Trust areas, in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 5178/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i) The number of patients that have been referred to private sector providers for MRI scans in each of the last 5 years, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust is outlined in the table below.

HSC Trust	Financial Year				
	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Western HSCT	0	165	781	1,091	1,268
Southern HSCT	0	0	0	0	690
South Eastern HSCT	0	0	0	0	0
Belfast HSCT	0	500	0	3,000	500
Northern HSCT1	N/A	N/A	N/A	1222	571
Northern Ireland Total	0	665	781	4,2132	3,029

1. The provision of data on the number of patients referred by the Northern HSC Trust to a private sector provider for a MRI scan prior to December 2006 would incur a disproportionate cost.
2. 2006/07 data for the Northern HSC Trust relates to patients referred to private sector organisations from December 2006 to March 2007.

(ii) The financial information requested is not collected centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

MRI Scans

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the capital and revenue costs of providing MRI scanners to the Health Service; and what is the average cost per patient. (AQW 5179/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are a wide range of variables that affect the capital and revenue costs of providing of providing MRI scanners and average cost per patient. These can include the specification of the scanner, total throughput of the unit, the body part to be scanned; and whether contrast media is used. In light of these variables I have provided a cost range in response to each element of your question.

The capital cost associated with providing a scanner would typically lie in the range of £600k - £800k.

Revenue costs typically lie in the range of £450k - £600k per annum per scanner.

The average cost per patient ranges from £185 - £670.

Cancer Drug Topotecan

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to make the cancer drug Topotecan available. (AQW 5191/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is currently considering topotecan for the treatment of cervical cancer which has recurred and lung cancer as a second-line treatment; guidance is expected to be published in October and November 2009 respectively. In addition, a review of topotecan as an option for the treatment of second-line or subsequent treatment of ovarian cancer is expected to commence in November 2009.

My Department has established a link with NICE whereby all guidance published by NICE from 1 July 2006 is reviewed locally for its applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, is endorsed by the Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. The NICE guidance on topotecan will be considered under local arrangements when issued.

Pending the issue of guidance to the HSC, the decision on whether to fund a particular treatment is a matter for Health and Social Services Boards. Currently, the drug is available for the treatment of ovarian cancer, but is not commonly used as it is not preferred by some clinicians. The drug is also available to patients in Northern Ireland on a cost per case basis for the treatment of metastatic cervical cancer.

Neonatal Staff

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail which hospitals meet the British Association for Perinatal Medicine's recommendation for one to one specialised nursing for babies in intensive care; what assessment is being made of any risk posed to patients by the shortage of specialised neonatal staff and what action he is taking to tackle this. (AQW 5275/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Each neo-natal unit in Northern Ireland aims to provide the nurse to patient ratios recommended by the British Association of Perinatal Medicine. We acknowledge however that, due to peaks and troughs in demand, this is not always possible. In this respect the position in Northern Ireland is similar situation to that elsewhere in the UK.

Maintaining appropriate neo-natal nurse staffing levels will clearly help manage risks to this patient group. The Department, as part of its workforce planning arrangements, will continue to review the supply and demand of appropriately trained neo-natal nursing staff to meet service needs. A review of the nursing and midwifery workforce has recently been initiated. This will identify any potential recruitment difficulties and indicate where any special initiatives might be necessary.

In 2008/09, £430k recurrent funding was allocated to fund an additional 14 WTE qualified nursing staff.

Residential Homes

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his Department's assessment of (i) the language change between the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's document 'Reprovision of the Trust's Residential Homes for Older People' (issued on 8 January 2009) and its document 'Modernisation Proposals Services for Older People Reprovision of Residential Homes' (issued on 19 January 2009); and (ii) the substitution of the word 'close' with the word 'replace' which constitutes a significant change from the original proposals that are subject to consultation; and will he instruct the Trust to withdraw these proposals and terminate the process. (AQW 5300/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have advised that the document "Modernisation Proposals Services for Older People Reprovision of Residential Homes" was issued to those who attended public consultation meetings and is a summary of the proposals contained in the Trust's consultation document, "Reprovision of the Trust's Residential Homes for Older People" There has been no change to the Trust's proposals and I have not, therefore, asked the Trust to withdraw proposals for the reform and modernisation of older people's services.

Knockbracken Healthcare Centre

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nursing posts in the Knockbracken Healthcare Centre are currently filled by agency staff. (AQW 5305/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Agency usage fluctuates on a daily basis according to staffing needs, therefore providing figures for a full month gives a more accurate view than figures for just one day.

Belfast HSC Trust has advised that during the month of January 2009 (which they also advise would be generally representative of any given month's usage), a total of 4829 hours of Agency Nursing staff was used on the Knockbracken HealthCare Park site. This equated to 26.10 (Whole-Time Equivalent) Band 2 Nurses and 3.62 (Whole-Time Equivalent) Band 5 Nurses.

Consultation Documents

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department or one of the Health and Social Care Trusts can withdraw a consultation document before the end of the statutory consultation period. (AQW 5336/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A consultation document would only be withdrawn before the end of a public consultation period if the original reason for consultation had been superseded, or where there was a need to correct factual information within the document.

Hillsborough Private Clinic

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services Hillsborough Private Clinic is providing to his Department; and what costs are involved. (AQW 5379/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: From April 2008 to December 2008 Hillsborough Private Clinic treated inpatients and daycases on behalf of Health and Social Care bodies in ENT, General Surgery, Ophthalmology, Oral Surgery, Urology, General Medicine and Gastroenterology.

It would not be appropriate to release details of the costs of one specific Independent Sector provider.

Taughmonagh Primary School

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action the Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is taking to address the situation at Taughmonagh Primary School where children with speech and language difficulties are not receiving therapy; and for his assessment of his Department's legal responsibility for providing this therapy. (AQW 5421/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust advises that it hopes to have a part time Speech and Language Therapist at Taughmonagh Primary School in post within the next 2-3 weeks. The Trust is also actively trying to secure appropriate Speech & Language Therapist resource to cover the current service gap, which has arisen due to sick leave. The Trust will issue a letter to all parents within the next few days detailing the service available, and an action plan including time frames.

My Department is currently working with the Department of Education to develop an action plan to improve speech and language therapy services for children. It is expected that the action plan will be completed by April 2009.

Wet Age Related Macular Degeneration

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the lack of a fully functional optical clinic to treat wet age related macular degeneration patients at Altnagelvin Hospital (i) what pressure this creates for the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust clinic; (ii) if it increases waiting lists for treatment; and (iii) if it delays the implementation of full service at both facilities. (AQW 5474/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Both the Belfast and Western Health and Social Care Trusts currently provide wet AMD treatment for those patients of greatest clinical priority.

At the end of December 2008, 20 patients resident in the Western Health and Social Services Board area were receiving treatment with Lucentis for wet AMD at the Belfast Trust. It should be noted that a patient's GP or optometrist may, in consultation with the patient, choose to refer them directly to a Belfast hospital for investigation or treatment. The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that no patients with clinical priority have been referred to Belfast because of capacity issues at Altnagelvin.

Both the Belfast and Western Trusts are currently in the process of expanding their existing services to provide treatment for wet AMD in line with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance endorsed by my Department on 21 October 2008.

GP Practices in Coleraine

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why some GP practices in the Coleraine area can admit patients to the Robinson Hospital, Ballymoney for palliative care, while other practices cannot. (AQW 5554/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: All GP practices in the Coleraine area may admit patients to the Robinson Hospital for palliative care providing a bed is available. Individual practices may determine, in discussion with the patient, to which hospital they refer the patient.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hedged Fuel Purchasing Agreement

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4389/09, in which currency these transactions are conducted, and if not pounds sterling, what exchange rates were received for each agreement. (AQW 4934/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): Translink have informed me that these arrangements are conducted in sterling.

Fuel Costs

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3742/09, what were the final fuel costs for December 2008. (AQW 4935/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the member to the answer given to AQW 4391/09 on 9 February 2009.

Gritting Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the process and criteria used to trigger the gritting of roads. (AQW 5015/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, before a road is considered for addition to the salting schedule it will first assess the volume of traffic on a route during the winter service period, that is, from October to April inclusive. Roads Service will then also consult with Translink and the relevant Education Board to ascertain the number of buses using the route on a daily basis. Buses are given special consideration, in that they are counted according to the number of seats on the bus, regardless of the number of passengers on the bus, for example, a 40-seater bus is counted as 40 vehicles. The total number of seats on the bus is added to the traffic count figures for the road, and from this a 7-day average traffic volume is calculated.

The criterion for inclusion of roads on the gritting schedule is as follows:-

- all Motorways and Trunk roads shall be treated;

- main through routes which carry more than 1,500 vehicles per day shall be treated;
- other busy through routes with special difficulties which carry more than 1,000 vehicles per day shall be considered. Special difficulties which are considered include the severity, frequency and extent of gradients, frequency of bends, the height above sea level, railway level crossings on the road and abnormally high junction frequencies. It should be noted that in relation to this category, consideration will be given to the availability of alternative or parallel routes which are on the treated network. Where such parallel or alternative routes are available, the routes qualifying under this criteria need not necessarily be salted; and
- small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more shall have a salted link to the nearest part of the existing salted network.

Gritting Services

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is considering changing the process and criteria used for triggering the gritting of roads and to provide a more localised and cost effective system.

(AQW 5016/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the gritting of rural roads was considered in the 2001 review of its Winter Service procedures. One of the key outcomes of that review, which was fully debated and accepted by the Assembly, was that the practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service, on the busier main through routes, should continue.

As a result of the review, the salting schedule has been increased by some 4%, with additional routes being determined by:

- ensuring that small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more should have a salted link to the nearest part of the existing salted network.
- allowing other busy routes with special difficulties, for example hilly areas, carrying between 1,000 - 1,500 vehicles per day, to be considered, if there are no nearby/parallel alternative salted routes; and
- using an increased weighting for buses, so that a 40-seater bus is now counted as 40 vehicles, regardless of the actual number of passengers.

In addition to this, on more lightly trafficked routes, Roads Service provides salt bins or grit piles for use by the public, on a self help basis.

As circumstances have not changed significantly since the assessment carried out in 2001 a further review of gritting procedures is not required at present. I can, however, advise that officials have agreed to examine the Roads Service operational response to areas around schools, which are regularly affected by adverse weather conditions.

Traffic Management

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Roads Service has spent on traffic management, carried out by its own staff, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5047/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service carries out traffic management on its roads network, mainly through Local Transport Safety Measures (LTSM). The majority of the LTSM budget is spent on the local road network, including the following activities:

- Network Development Schemes;
- Safer Routes to Schools;
- Collision Remedial Schemes; and
- Footway Construction.

The table below sets out the total amounts spent in each of the last five years on LTSM schemes.

Financial Year	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Budget (£m)	33,678	32,379	22,443	26,809	22,459

Roads Service's financial records do not distinguish between the traffic management carried out by Road Service's in-house contractor and that carried out by private contractors. I am advised however, that the majority of the budget is expended on external contractors.

Traffic Management

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service allows traffic management to be carried out on their network by unapproved companies without traffic safety control officers. (AQW 5048/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it can only use contractors with the appropriate Street Works qualifications, when contracting out work.

All work is required to be supervised by competent contractors, who must satisfy stringent Health and Safety requirements, before they will be permitted to tender for contracts.

Traffic Management

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Roads Service has spent on traffic management, carried out by private contractors, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5049/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to my answer to his recent Assembly Question AQW 5047/09.

Airport Bus

Mr D Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider extending (i) the bus lane time for the airport bus from Templepatrick to Belfast past the 9:30 limit; and (ii) the length of the bus lane. (AQW 5050/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Departments Roads Service has advised that the ongoing downstream M2 motorway widening scheme is expected to be completed in April 2009, and this should help reduce queue lengths and delays on the approach to Sandyknowes. In these circumstances, there are no plans, at present, to extend the operational hours or length of this bus lane.

The situation will be reviewed, when traffic conditions have settled down, following the completion of the widening scheme.

Translink

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many paying customers used (i) trains; and (ii) buses each month, in the past three years. (AQW 5056/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have indicated that they could not extract monthly information from their database in the time available. Translink have, however, provided the following annual figures for paying customers using bus and rail in the last three complete years:

	2005/06 (‘000)	2006/07 (‘000)	2007/08 (‘000)
Metro	17,919	18,481	20,159
Ulsterbus	17,522	17,768	18,386
NIR	6,435	7,366	8,213

In the table ‘paying customers’ are defined as customers who pay full fare, discounted fare or part of a fare which attracts concessionary fare.

Translink have not included Metro and Ulsterbus pupil pass numbers (non-electronic passes bought by parents from Translink for pupils), commuter card numbers (non-electronic annual adult passes) or paper based ticket numbers in the above. These categories should strictly be included under the definition of ‘paying customer’ but the numbers will be relatively small.

Public Transport

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many free public transport pass holders used (i) trains; and (ii) buses each month, in the last three years. (AQW 5057/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised that it does not hold the information in the format requested. Additionally, Translink has pointed out that it records the number of passenger journeys where a Smartpass has been used, not the number of journeys made by each pass holder. Set out below are the annual figures for the number of passenger journeys where a Smartpass has been used on bus and rail in the last three financial years:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Metro	3,929,434	3,970,331	4,140,302
Ulsterbus	3,449,042	3,456,282	3,719,589
Northern Ireland Railways	492,739	611,776	732,655

Parking Meters

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what was the total revenue from parking meters in Lisburn City Centre, in the last 12 months. (AQW 5084/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that in addition to Pay and Display machines in car parks, on-street machines in Lisburn City Centre also became operational on 28 July 2008.

A breakdown of the revenue collected from these parking meters in Lisburn City Centre is as follows:

- From the 28 July 2008 to the 31 January 2009 – receipts from the on-street machines totalled £160,000.
- In the 12 month period to the end of January 2009- receipts from the Pay and Display machines in Roads Service car parks totalled £710,500.

Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if the current review of services provided by Translink includes the possibility of job losses within the organisation. (AQW 5086/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink is still developing its Corporate Plan for the next financial year and following two years in which it will set out how it can best provide public transport services within the budget available to it. In preparing the Plan, Translink will have to consider a range of options for using its resources in the most effective way. That process has not yet been completed, so at this stage it is not possible to make any definitive statement as to the contents of the Plan. I would, however, expect that Translink will make every effort to avoid redundancies.

Translink

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4930/09, when were each of these contracts (i) negotiated; and (ii) finalised. (AQW 5087/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have explained that the word 'negotiation' does not exactly describe the contract process; rather the price reflects the market price at the time the contract is completed/finalised.

The contracts were completed/finalised as follows:

	ULSD	Gas Oil
24 Months April 2004 to March 2006	04/03/04	04/03/04
6 Months April 2006 to September 2006	17/04/06	17/04/06
6 Months October 2006 to March 2007	21/08/06	21/08/06
6 Months April 2007 to September 2007	05/09/06	22/09/06
6 Months October 2007 to March 2008	17/11/06	22/11/06
6 Months April 2008 to September 2008	28/03/08	28/03/08
3 Months October 2008 to December 2008	22/04/08	22/04/08
6 Months January 2009 to June 2009	23/05/08	23/05/08
3 Months July 2009 to September 2009	05/06/08	05/06/08
3 Months October 2009 to December 2009	25/07/08	25/07/08
6 Months January 2010 to June 2010	12/09/08	12/09/08

Note: The figures above include one period, in April 2006, when fuel was purchased direct from the supplier at the market price before a forward contract was put in place in May 2006.

Translink

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for the cost of installing CCTV cameras on Translink buses. (AQW 5151/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The budget estimate to supply and fit a multi-camera digital CCTV system per bus is typically £3,000. However, the cost can vary depending on the type of vehicle and specification of the CCTV system.

Translink

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Translink buses in the Ballymena area (i) are equipped with CCTV cameras; (ii) are not equipped with CCTV cameras; and (iii) are due to have CCTV cameras installed, in the next three years. (AQW 5155/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that, of the buses operating out of the Ballymena depot, 26 are equipped with CCTV and 34 are not. There are no plans to retro-fit these 34 buses with CCTV. However, all new buses will be fitted with CCTV.

Bus Shelters

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what is his Department's policy for the provision of bus shelters; and what percentage of bus stops have shelters. (AQW 5180/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service entered into a 15-year contract with bus shelter provider Adshel, in 2001, to provide approximately 1500 bus shelters across the North. The provision and maintenance of these shelters is funded by Adshel through advertising revenue and at no cost to the Department.

All Councils, with the exception of Fermanagh District Council, have signed up to this contract, which restricts them from providing advertising shelters from any other source. All Councils, as well as Translink, are also permitted to provide additional non-advertising bus shelters at their own expense.

When a request for a bus shelter is received, my Department consults with Translink to ensure there is either sufficient usage, or the potential for future public transport growth, at the particular stop. This ensures best use is made of the limited resources available.

The Roads Service contract has to date provided some 1200 bus shelters.

With regard to what percentage of bus stops have shelters, as explained above, there are three providers of bus shelters. In addition, Translink do not maintain central records on the numbers/locations of bus stops. It is therefore not possible to provide the percentage information requested by the Member.

School Bus Routes

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many school bus routes in the North Eastern Education and Library Board area are not gritted during severe winter weather. (AQW 5206/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service does not hold records of the school bus routes which are included in the Winter Service schedule. I can also advise that as Translink don't operate a dedicated school bus fleet, it does not record information in respect of mileage of bus services operated to carry children to and from school.

However, I can advise that the salting of school bus routes was considered in the 2001 review of my Department's Winter Service policy and procedures. One of the key outcomes of that review, which was fully debated and accepted by the Assembly, was that the practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes, should continue.

The review also estimated that to include all school bus routes within the Department's gritting schedule, would more than double the annual cost of our salting operation. In addition to a substantial capital investment in new vehicles, it would cost some £4.5-7.0 million extra every year.

Nevertheless, the review recommended that buses in service, including school buses, receive special consideration when determining whether a road should be included in the salting schedule. A 40 seat bus is now counted as 40 vehicles for the purpose identifying qualifying routes. Also as a result of the review, road links to small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more are now salted.

Whilst I fully understand your concerns, there is a fine balance to be drawn between putting even further funds into salting and increasing funding for other activities, such as road maintenance, or Roads Service's collision remedial works programme. You may be interested to note that the latter resulted in reducing the total number of target collisions in 2006/07 by 68%, while increased investment in road maintenance would improve the wet weather skidding resistance of road surfaces throughout the whole of the year.

I have no plans to carry out a further review of my Department's Winter Service policy, as there has been no significant change in circumstances since the completion of the 2001 review. However, I can advise that officials are currently examining the operational response to areas around schools, which are regularly affected by adverse weather conditions.

A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road Dualling

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the pre-consultation process for the A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road dualling. (AQW 5217/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has met with the majority of the land and property owners affected by this scheme since the announcement of the preferred route for the A26 Glarryford to Drones Roads scheme, in August 2008, and plan to meet the rest during this current stage of the assessment process.

Roads Service will continue to communicate and engage with the land and property owners directly affected by the scheme throughout the remainder of the project.

School Bus Routes

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how many school bus routes in the Southern Education and Library Board area are not gritted during severe winter weather. (AQW 5221/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service does not hold records of the school bus routes which are included in the Winter Service schedule. I can also advise that as Translink don't operate

a dedicated school bus fleet, it does not record information in respect of the mileage of bus services operated to carry children to and from school.

However, I can advise that the salting of school bus routes was considered in the 2001 review of my Department's Winter Service policy and procedures. One of the key outcomes of that review, which was fully debated and accepted by the Assembly, was that the practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes, should continue.

The review also estimated that to include all school bus routes within the Department's gritting schedule, would more than double the annual cost of our salting operation. In addition to a substantial capital investment in new vehicles, it would cost some £4.5-7.0 million extra every year.

Nevertheless, the review recommended that buses in service, including school buses, receive special consideration when determining whether a road should be included in the salting schedule. A 40 seat bus is now counted as 40 vehicles, for the purpose identifying qualifying routes. Also as a result of the review, road links to small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more are now salted.

Whilst I fully understand your concerns, there is a fine balance to be drawn between putting even further funds into salting and increasing funding for other activities, such as road maintenance, or Roads Service's collision remedial works programme. You may be interested to note that the latter resulted in reducing the total number of target collisions in 2006/07 by 68%, while increased investment in road maintenance would improve the wet weather skidding resistance of road surfaces throughout the whole of the year.

I have no plans to carry out a further review of my Department's Winter Service policy, as there has been no significant change in circumstances since the completion of the 2001 review. However, I can advise that officials are currently examining the operational response to areas around schools, which are regularly affected by adverse weather conditions.

Rathgael Road, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he would consider introducing a weight restriction on traffic using the Rathgael Road, Bangor. (AQW 5254/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Rathgael Road in Bangor carries approximately 16,000 vehicles per day and is a through route, linking the A2 Belfast Road to areas on the periphery of Bangor. Under the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, the Rathgael Road is designated as a local distributor.

In addition to this, Rathgael Road forms part of a local bus route and also serves development in the area, therefore, heavy goods vehicles need to use the road to access the petrol filling station and shops situated along it.

Heavy goods vehicles are sometimes prohibited from using a road by the use of weight limit restrictions. However, these are normally only introduced on roads for structural reasons, that is, where there are weak bridges or culverts, or where the road structure is physically unable to take the weight of heavy vehicles. Rathgael Road would not fall within this category and would not warrant the introduction of a weight limit. Therefore, I can advise that Roads Service has no plans to introduce a weight restriction on traffic using the Rathgael Road, Bangor.

Traffic on M2

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development why commuters were caught up in heavy traffic on the M2 on Sunday 15 February. (AQW 5266/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I regret that there was inconvenience caused to road users during the closure of the M2 on Sunday 15 February. This was a planned closure to allow the final surfacing to be laid on the city bound carriageway of the M2, and the closure was well advertised through the normal range of channels.

During the closure Roads Service used variable message signs to display information about the motorway closure on a number of overhead gantries between Templepatrick and Sandyknowes junction. Our contractor also displayed information on a portable variable message sign between Rathbeg (Junction 6) and Templepatrick (junction 5). This information was to enable road users the opportunity to leave the route at Templepatrick and use an alternative route.

However, once traffic passed these advisory signs, which specified that part of the road ahead was closed, they became 'locked' into the road, as no further exits were available.

At the Sandyknowes junction it was necessary to reduce the slip road to one lane as it left the M2, because of problems with merging traffic on the roundabout, causing traffic to lock up the circulatory part of the roundabout. This was to allow traffic to be safely channelled through the roundabout and onto the diversionary route. In addition to this traffic signal timings, at the M2 and A8(M) were adjusted, during the closure, to maximise the throughput of traffic at Sandyknowes junction.

A weekend day was selected to ensure that the large majority of commuters with regular weekday travelling patterns would not be affected. In the past the M2 had been reduced to one lane on Sundays, over this stretch, without significant delays. However, it appears that on this occasion, there may have been more traffic than normal on this weekend, which exacerbated the problems.

While it is undoubtedly the case that some commuters were affected I hope that you will agree that Roads Service did take reasonable steps to inform people about the planned closure of the M2 on Sunday.

Finally, I can also advise that there are currently no further daytime closures planned for this part of the network.

School Bus Routes

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many school bus routes; (ii) and how many miles in the Western Education and Library Board area were gritted during the severe winter weather.

(AQW 5322/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service does not hold records of the school bus routes which are included in the Winter Service schedule. I can also advise that as Translink don't operate a dedicated school bus fleet, it does not record information in respect of the mileage of bus services operated to carry children to and from school.

However, I can advise that the salting of school bus routes was considered in the 2001 review of my Department's Winter Service policy and procedures. One of the key outcomes of that review, which was fully debated and accepted by the Assembly, was that the practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes, should continue.

The review also estimated that to include all school bus routes within the Department's gritting schedule, would more than double the annual cost of our salting operation. In addition to a substantial capital investment in new vehicles, it would cost some £4.5-7.0 million extra every year.

Nevertheless, the review recommended that buses in service, including school buses, receive special consideration when determining whether a road should be included in the salting schedule. A 40 seat bus is now counted as 40 vehicles for the purpose identifying qualifying routes. Also as a result of the review, road links to small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more are now salted.

Whilst I fully understand your concerns, there is a fine balance to be drawn between putting even further funds into salting and increasing funding for other activities, such as road maintenance, or Roads Service's collision remedial works programme. You may be interested to note that the latter resulted in reducing the total number of target collisions in 2006/07 by 68%, while increased investment in road maintenance would improve the wet weather skidding resistance of road surfaces throughout the whole of the year.

I have no plans to carry out a further review of my Department's Winter Service policy, as there has been no significant change in circumstances since the completion of the 2001 review. However, I can advise that officials are currently examining the operational response to areas around schools, which are regularly affected by adverse weather conditions.

School Bus Routes

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many school bus routes; (ii) and how many miles in the Western Education and Library Board area were not gritted during the severe winter weather

(AQW 5323/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to my reply to his recent Assembly Question AQW 5322/09.

Boa Island Road (A47) at Commons, Belleek

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide a date for the resurfacing of the stretch of road at the Boa Island Road (A47) at Commons, Belleek. (AQW 5337/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service anticipate that the resurfacing scheme planned for the A47, Boa Island Road at Commons, Belleek, will be delivered within the next two years. However, at present, it is not possible to provide a more definite date for the commencement of this scheme.

Enniskillen to Sligo Road

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development if the upgrading of Enniskillen to Sligo Road was raised at the North South Ministerial Council meeting on 23 January 2009. (AQW 5338/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The upgrading of the Enniskillen to Sligo Road was not raised at the North South Ministerial Council meeting held in plenary format on 23 January 2009.

However, this issue was discussed at my Bilateral Transport meeting with Noel Dempsey, TD, on 7 November 2008 and I will raise it again at the next North South Ministerial Council Transport Sector meeting in April 2009.

New Trains

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the outcome of the tendering process for new train sets, and to provide an estimate when passengers using the Larne line can expect to benefit from improved levels of service through new rolling stock. (AQW 5369/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I intend to make an announcement about the award of contract prior to the end of this financial year and I can confirm good progress has been made. The first of the batch of 20 new trains is scheduled to be introduced to passenger service by 2011 with the final set in 2013. This will allow the old trains currently in service on the Larne line to be replaced.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number and percentage of employees in his Department who have disabilities. (AQW 5374/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Information on the number of staff who have disabilities is collected for equality monitoring purposes by the Department of Finance and Personnel on behalf of all NICS Departments.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will therefore be responding on behalf of all Departments.

Hillhead Road, Newry

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development in relation to Hillhead Road, Newry, (i) for how long it has been closed; (ii) what feedback he has received from the resident's survey; and (iii) when will he make a decision about its future. (AQW 5380/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service closed the Hillhead Road, Newry to the general public on 26 January 2007, with an additional section of the road closed on 21 August 2008 following the detection of further movement on the road.

Roads Service conducted a survey of all local residents to ascertain opinion on the possible options being considered for Hillhead Road. On 25 June 2008, twenty-five letters were issued to residents along the road, with fourteen valid replies returned. Eight of the replies favoured the road being stopped up, or remaining closed,

to effectively create a cul-de-sac. The remaining six replies were in favour of the road being realigned and full through vehicular traffic being re-established.

Roads Service is currently examining the best economic option for the Hillhead Road. This will involve further discussions with Consultant Engineers, who are examining realignment and cul-de-sac options for the road. There is also likely to be the need for further dialogue with the owners of the Drumalane Quarry. I am not in a position to outline when any decision will be taken about the future of the Hillhead Road, but can confirm that full consultation will take place with all interested parties before any decisions are reached.

Water Charges

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development if water charges are not introduced in 2010, what is the estimated cost to the Executive in (i) 2010; (ii) 2011; and (iii) 2012. (AQW 5381/09)

Minister for Regional Development: At its meeting on 20 November 2008 the Executive decided that there will be no household water and sewerage payments in 2009/10. As part of the Budget Stocktake exercise commissioned by the Finance Minister covering 2009/10 and 2010/11 my Department estimated increased Northern Ireland Water (NIW) subsidy requirements of £180 million in 2009/10 if additional household payments were deferred.

Additional subsidy for NIW may be required in 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 but the magnitude of this will depend on the Executive's policy for the future. I propose to put forward advice to the Executive in consultation with the Finance Minister shortly.

A32 Between Omagh and Enniskillen

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety regarding the upgrading of the A32 between Omagh and Enniskillen. (AQW 5386/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Although I have not met recently with Minister McGimpsey to discuss the upgrading of the A32 between Omagh and Enniskillen, I have been corresponding with him regarding these important roads improvements.

In my most recent correspondence, I undertook to keep Minister McGimpsey informed of any significant changes to the timescale for implementing the road improvements on the A32.

A32 Between Omagh and Enniskillen

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment his Department has made of the overall works and financial commitment needed for upgrading the A32 from Omagh to the new Acute Hospital in Enniskillen. (AQW 5387/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) 2018, announced in April 2008, included a package of road realignment and widening improvements on the A32 between Omagh and Enniskillen, at an estimated cost of £10 million. This was supplemented by additional funding of £5 million from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to carry out road improvements to facilitate blue light services on this stretch of road.

This funding will enable a number of road improvements to be completed on the A32 during the ten year period covered by the IDP.

Consultants are currently preparing road improvement schemes at Esker Bog, between Dromore and Irvinestown, and at Sidare, between Irvinestown and Enniskillen. It is anticipated that these schemes will be delivered prior to the opening of the new acute hospital.

Consultants are also preparing schemes at Shannaragh, between Omagh and Dromore, Cornamuck and Newpark, between Dromore and Irvinestown, and at Kilgortnaleague, between Irvinestown and Enniskillen. It is anticipated that these schemes will not be delivered until after the opening of the new acute hospital, due to the statutory procedures that have to be followed.

Translink

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development how much grant aid has been paid to Translink for improving road safety signage on school buses, in each of the last three years. (AQW 5391/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department has not paid any grant aid to Translink in the last three years for improving road safety signage on school buses. In 2007/08, £3.4m had been allocated to enable Translink to introduce signage and lighting on school buses on the understanding that the necessary legislation would be in place. However, the regulations, which fall within the remit of the Department of the Environment, have not yet been introduced and the £3.4m was surrendered. My Department will rebid for the funding as required.

In the interim, Translink have fitted large yellow warning signs at the rear of the buses and installed bumper cameras to improve safety on buses used for school transport. The bumper camera allows the driver to view the front of the vehicle on his monitor for up to 30 seconds after the door is closed. Additionally, all recently purchased Translink buses have been fitted with red reflective strips at the rear. However, these costs are not separately identifiable.

Translink

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink would place information about bus times on public display in Rasharkin. (AQW 5410/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that two timetable displays were put up in Rasharkin on 13 February 2009.

Translink

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the fuel purchasing policy currently operated by Translink. (AQW 5436/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink operates a fuel purchasing policy where future fuel needs are contracted in advance at a fixed price. This has operated for a number of years and is typical of all transport companies.

Current policy is to enter into contracts by calendar quarter and to have between 5 and 8 quarters ahead covered at any time. This means that at the end of a quarter as a contract expires, fuel will be purchased for the period 12 - 15 months in advance ('quarter 5') and up to 15 - 24 months in advance ('quarters 6 to 8').

This arrangement was put in place in April 2008, prior to this, fuel was purchased forward as far as up to 24 months although there was no set period defined in policy.

Translink also ensures that forward contracts normally cover between 85% and 90% of requirements.

Translink also hedges to 'guarantee' the cost of fuel over the period of the contract. This reduces financial risk / facilitates stable financial planning.

Department's Western Division

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development to breakdown the levels of funding allocated to each section office in his Department's Western Division. (AQW 5486/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Road Service budget is allocated to its Divisions and the Section Offices on a basis of need.

In relation to roads maintenance, the resources available are allocated to the four Roads Service Divisions using a range of weighted indicators, which are tailored to each maintenance activity, including resurfacing, patching, gully emptying and grass cutting. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning resources across Sections, to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the whole of the North. The level of funding allocated to each section office in Western Division for maintenance operations, as at 23 February 2009, is as follows:-

Magherafelt	£2,522,000
Omagh	£4,317,000
Strabane	£3,913,000
Cookstown	£1,983,000
Fermanagh	£4,900,000
Dungannon	£4,652,000

In relation to the Roads Service budget for major works, improvements are prioritised across the whole of the North, after considering a wide range of criteria, which includes strategic planning policy, traffic flow, number of accidents, potential savings in travel times, impact on the environment and value for money. While the actual spend on a major work scheme may be within one Roads Service Division, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the area covered by a Division, Section, constituency or county, in which it is located.

With regard to Roads Service expenditure on minor road improvements, which includes minor works, accident remedial schemes, transportation measures and minor bridge strengthening, the resources available for such works are allocated to the four Roads Service Divisions, on the basis of need. This approach uses indicators such as population, weighted road lengths and the number of accidents. It also prioritises work to our bridge structures, using criteria such as loading restrictions due to bridge failures and/or defects and parapet repairs as a result of changes to current legislation. The Divisional budget is then split across the Sections in the Division using the same criteria. This approach ensures, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the North.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to list all the consultancy companies that have received payment from Northern Ireland Water since its inception; and (ii) to detail how much each company has been paid. (AQW 5512/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the associated fees and other costs of external consultancy firms employed from 1 April 2007 to 31 January 2009 are as detailed below. The costs are exclusive of VAT and do not include consultancy relating to the design and build of capital projects.

Adjust Procurement Solutions	£14,735
Alvarez & Marsal Europe	£10,934
Anna Shiels	£7,058
Austin Hunter	£800
AV Browne Advertising Ltd	£3,780
BCM Services	£760
BDO Stoy Hayward	£17,275
Black & Veatch Ltd	£46,383
BT Plc	£695
BTW Shiells	£26,772
Building Design Partnership	£5,957
Business Publications Company	£134,415
Capita Business Services Ltd	£6,808
Central Procurement Directorate	£268
Changing Chains	£75,508
CLN Solutions	£147,903

Consult NBI Ltd	£34,850
Contracting Out LLP	£380,063
Dundas & Wilson CSLLP	£163,331
E McMullan Ltd	£1,400
EIM	£49,618
Eleven Thirty Design	£990
Empathy Ratings Syndicated Research	£4,200
Ernst & Young	£10,044
Frontier Economics	£175,431
Fujitsu	£32,614
Glen Water	£33,320
Grafton Consultancy	£20,170
Halcrow Management Science Ltd	£83,295
HCL Communications	£1,390
Independent Occupational Health Ltd	£21,013
Insideredge	£42,500
Interim Management Assignments (NI) Ltd	£199,641
Jacobs Uk Ltd	£38,276
John Smyth	£66,123
Kirkwood Management Consultants	£56,800
Love PR	£4,320
Martin Cowley Media	£8,000
McAdams Design	£359,452
Mercer Human Resource Consulting Ltd	£63,340
MOTT MacDonald Group	£1,409,816
MWH Ltd	£341,555
NI Computing Ltd.	£13,714
NI Statistics	£17,846
Nick Owen Associates Ltd	£1,922
Ntuition Ltd	£112,456
Nueda	£7,480
Odour Assessment	£6,700
Ollave	£4,219
Peter Graham Consultancy Ltd	£5,400
Practical Planning Limited	£79,560
Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP	£8,311,866
Prime Transformation Ltd	£4,500
Robinson Consulting	£31,926
Rospa (Health & Safety Audit)	£31,310
Sackers & Partners	£8,831

Stakeholder Communications Ltd	£16,118
Strategic Planning	£3,600
The Event - Ful consultancy	£22,450
Water UK Information & Learning	£798
Water people	£2,700
Weber Shandwick	£50,270
Total	£12,835,269

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Disability Living Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many awards for lifetime Disability Living Allowance have been refused in the Strangford constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4734/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The Welfare Reform and Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 removed the term “for life” in respect of awards of Disability Living Allowance and amended it to state awards “for an indefinite period.” Information is not available in the format requested as awards for an “indefinite period” occur when applications for Disability Living Allowance have been successful.

Construction Companies

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to list all work on behalf on her Department that construction companies are to carry out over the next 6 months and to indicate what jobs have been or are being delayed. (AQW 4986/09)

Minister for Social Development: The list of all work that construction companies are to carry out over the next six months is below. No jobs have been, or are being, delayed.

BELFAST

- Obel - residential development
- Lanyon Towers - mixed use development
- The Soloist - office development
- The Boat - mixed use development
- St. Anne's Square - mixed use development
- Belfast City Centre Public Realm Regeneration Project
- 'The Mac' - arts centre in Cathedral Quarter
- Pottingers Quay - mixed use development
- Jobs and Benefits Office - Andersonstown

CRUMLIN ROAD GAOL/GIRDWOOD PARK SITE

- Ground resurfacing on various parts of the Gaol site
- Erection of temporary office accommodation at the Gaol
- Installation of telecommunications and electrical infrastructure to serve temporary office accommodation
- Repairs to fencing at Girdwood Park
- Demolition of former prison laundry
- Erection of new accommodation for security staff
- Post-demolition restoration work to the Gaol

DERRY

- Derry City Centre Public Realm Scheme
- Environmental Improvement Scheme at Jacqueline Way in Derry

BALLYMENA

- Jobs and Benefits office

In relation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, work relating to the Housing Executive's programmes cannot be listed as it is too early in the review of their programmes to state the specific locations that might be affected by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget

Social Housing Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to list the social housing projects underway in the North Down constituency; and the total value of each investment. (AQW 5062/09)

Minister for Social Development: There are four social housing projects currently onsite in the Programme year 2008/09:

- 6 units at Church Lane, Donaghadee
- 34 units at Shaftesbury Road, Bangor
- 5 units at 115-117 Hamilton Road, Bangor
- 11 units at 38-40 Bryansburn Road, Bangor

For reasons of commercial sensitivity the Housing Executive does not release individual scheme values with regard to the Social Housing Development Programme.

Social Housing Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to list the social housing projects scheduled for the North Down constituency in the next two financial years; and the total value of each investment. (AQW 5063/09)

Minister for Social Development: This information can not currently be provided as the new 5 year Social Housing Development Programme (2009/10 – 2013/14) is currently being formulated and, pending appropriate approvals, will be published on the Housing Executive's website at www.nihe.gov.uk. For reasons of commercial sensitivity the Housing Executive will not release individual scheme values with regard to the Social Housing Development Programme.

Car Parking Spaces

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what the cost would be to create car parking spaces for the residents of Priors Lea, Holywood. (AQW 5103/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has not sought any costings regarding the provision of car parking spaces at Priors Lea Holywood as only 5 of the 17 properties are in Housing Executive ownership. The Housing Executive's policy is to only consider carrying out such works where at least 50% of the housing stock affected is in its ownership. It would be inappropriate for public housing funds to be used primarily for the benefit of private home owners.

Car Parking Spaces

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development would she agree to proposals from other funding bodies for car parking spaces for residents of Priors Lea, Holywood. (AQW 5104/09)

Minister for Social Development: If another funding body or agency wishes to bring forward proposals regarding this issue then the Housing Executive would be willing to discuss them.

Housing Executive

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties are controlled by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the (i) Newtownabbey I; (ii) Newtownabbey II; and (iii) Antrim District office areas. (AQW 5113/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's stock at 31 January 2009, is as follows:

Newtownabbey District Office 1	2248
Newtownabbey District Office 2	2168
Antrim District Office	2468

Housing Executive

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how many Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties in (i) Newtownabbey II; and (ii) Antrim District office areas are being used or held for decant purposes. (AQW 5114/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties being used or held for decant purposes are:

Newtownabbey District Office 2	53
Antrim District Office	31

New Houses

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many new houses have been bought off the shelf from private developers; and how many new houses have been built with departmental funding. (AQW 5140/09)

Minister for Social Development: In respect of the 2008/09 Social Housing Development Programme, as of 13 February 2009, 155 off the shelf units had been acquired. There have been 56 newbuild completions so far in 2008/09.

Grants Office

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if an additional £100,000 will be allocated to the grants office that covers (i) Castlereagh Borough Council; (ii) Ards Borough Council; and (iii) North Down constituency. (AQW 5158/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has confirmed that an additional £100,000 has been allocated to the Dundonald Grants Office which covers the areas included within Castlereagh Borough Council, Ards Borough Council, and North Down Council.

Housing Benefit Applications

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what steps she is taking to address the delay in processing housing benefit applications in Ards District. (AQW 5159/09)

Minister for Social Development: Within the administrative area covered by the Housing Executive's Newtownards District Office an average of 76% of new Housing Benefit claims were assessed within 14 days of all information being received (for the period April to December 2008). This has been against the background of

a significant increase in Housing Benefit caseload. In view of this increase in demand, the Housing Executive is currently implementing a plan to increase Housing Benefit resources.

Houses with Special Adaptations

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses with special adaptations have been allocated to applicants under 18 years of age. (AQW 5160/09)

Minister for Social Development: In the financial year 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2008 the Housing Executive allocated six properties with special adaptations to applicants under 18 years of age. Information from Housing Associations for the same period indicates that one property with special adaptations was allocated to an applicant under 18 years of age.

Cavity Wall Insulation

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development if financial assistance will be made available for cavity wall insulation for the financial year 2009/10; and if she will make a statement. (AQW 5166/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme has been the subject of a Northern Ireland Audit Office report and a Public Accounts Committee hearing. Taking on board the recommendations made by the Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, I proposed a number of changes to the Warm Homes Scheme which were the subject of a public consultation exercise. A new Warm Homes Scheme will be introduced in Spring 2009. Cavity wall insulation will be offered to applicants eligible for assistance under the new Warm Homes Scheme as part of a package of insulation measures to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

Departmental Budget

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail by (i) reason; and (ii) purpose how much of her Department's budget was spent in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February 2006. (AQW 5193/09)

Minister for Social Development: Since 3 February 2006, a total of some £15.72m has been spent by my Department in the Upper Springfield Area of West Belfast. The reasons for and purpose of this expenditure are detailed in the table below.

Amount	Reason	Purpose
£4.15m	Cost related to Falls Road Social Security /Jobs & Benefits Office	Office running costs
£5.01m £2.70m	Cost related to Andersonstown Social Security Office & New Jobs & Benefits Office construction	Office running costs; Jobs & Benefits Office construction costs to date
£0.20m	Social security benefit expenditure as administered by Falls Road & Andersonstown offices	Income Support & Jobseekers Allowance costs only
£3.08m	Various sponsored projects in the Upper Springfield Neighbourhood Renewal Area	Neighbourhood Renewal funding; Environmental Improvement scheme funding and Urban Development Grant
£0.58m	Various Housing expenditure	Northern Ireland Housing Executive programmes
£15.72m	Total Expenditure	

Rehousing Displaced Families

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much of her Department's budget was spent on rehousing displaced families; and how many families were rehoused, in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February 2006. (AQW 5194/09)

Minister for Social Development: Approximately £9300 was spent on rehousing two displaced families in the Upper Springfield area since 3 February 2006.

Vacant Properties in the Upper Springfield

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much of her Department's budget was spent on securing vacant properties in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February 2006. (AQW 5195/09)

Minister for Social Development: Since 3 February 2006 the Northern Ireland Housing Executive spent £9930 securing vacant properties in the Upper Springfield area.

Refurbishing Damaged Properties

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much of her Department's budget was spent on refurbishing damaged properties in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February 2006. (AQW 5196/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive estimates that £122.4k was spent on refurbishing damaged properties in the Upper Springfield area since 3 February 2006.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how much has the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme paid out; or is offering on properties, in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February 2006. (AQW 5197/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has, through the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme paid out, or is offering on properties in the Upper Springfield Road area, since 3 February 2006, a total of £542,500.

Department's Court Cases

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what were the (i) costs; and (ii) reasons, for her Department's court cases, resulting from actions in the Upper Springfield area, from 3 February 2006. (AQW 5200/09)

Minister for Social Development: The costs to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for instigating legal proceedings in the Upper Springfield Road area since 3 February 2006 was £6.4k approximately. These proceedings were to seek to recover possession of six properties, on the grounds of anti social behaviour.

Anti-social Behaviour Cases

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of anti-social behaviour cases reported to the NIHE, in the Upper Springfield area, since 3 February, 2006. (AQW 5201/09)

Minister for Social Development: 342 cases of anti-social behaviour were reported to the NIHE in the Upper Springfield area from 3 February 2006 until 20 February 2009. A breakdown is shown in the table below:-

Upper Springfield area Estates	Complaint type	No of Cases recorded
	Alcohol or Substance Abuse	6
	Boundary Dispute	3
	Criminal Behaviour	49
Whiterock	Damage Property	83
Ballymurphy	Drugs	2
Moyard	Gardens	2
New Barnsley	Harassment	33
Turf Lodge/Gortnamonagh	Multiple	33
Gransha/Downfine	Noise	56
Westrock	Nuisance from Business Use	2
Springhill	Nuisance in public space	9
Springfield Park	Pets and Animals	12
Dermott Hill	Rubbish Dumping	38
	Verbal Abuse	14
	Total	342

Warm Home Schemes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the delivery of the Warm Home Schemes from 2000-2008; and has it delivered its objectives. (AQW 5238/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme has been extremely successful and hugely popular. The Scheme has provided energy efficiency measures to some 70,000 households and to date my Department has invested almost £118 million. In addition my Department is on track to meet its Public Service Agreement target this year. Although levels of fuel poverty have risen to 34% according to the 2006 House Condition Survey, this can be attributed to the sustained rise in global energy prices. However, had it not been for the Warm Homes Scheme, this figure would have been considerably higher. The Northern Ireland Audit Office, while recognising the valuable contribution the Warm Homes Scheme has made to thousands of households, recommended a number of changes to the Scheme to increase its effectiveness. These recommendations have been taken on board and a new scheme will be operational in the spring.

Departmental Agencies

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development which departmental agencies (i) have advice or helpline numbers that use non-geographical numbers; and (ii) what is the cost per minute for dialling these numbers. (AQW 5292/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency provides a range of telephony and text phone services that use non-geographical numbers, these are included in the following table;

Service line	Tel number	Text Phone
Pension Service Enquiry Line	0845 6018821	
Pension Service Enquiry Line		0845 601 8841
Pension Service Enquiry Line		0808 100 2198
Pension Service Teleclaims	0808 100 2658	

Service line	Tel number	Text Phone
Pension Service Teleclaims		0808 100 2198
Pension Service Application Line	0808 100 6165	
Compensation Recovery Unit	0845 3590017	
Debt Management Unit	0845 3580027	
Benefit Leaflet Information Service	0845 6052020	
Benefit Enquiry Line	0800 220674	
Benefit Enquiry Line		0800 243787
Benefit Fraud Hotline	0800 975 6050	
Social Fund Crisis Loans	0800 0288822	
Disability and Carers Service Text phone		0800 242787
N.I. Contributions Deficiency	0845 603332	
N.I. Contributions Deficiency		0845 602 1277
Employment Support Allowance Fresh Claims	0800 085 6318	
Employment Support Allowance Change of Circumstances	0845 602 7301	
Employment Support Allowance Text phone		0800 328 3419

BT does not change customers for 0800 or 0808 numbers. Calls to 0845 numbers are now free to BT customers depending on their calling plan. For those customers not receiving free calls they will be charged an 8p set up charge and 1.96p per minute during the day and 0.49p per minute for evening calls.

Customers ringing from a non BT landline or mobile may be charged by their network provider for the connection onto the BT number.

Housing Executive

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people were on the Housing Executive waiting list in the East Belfast constituency, in (i) 2006-2007; (ii) 2007-2008; and (iii) current financial year.

(AQW 5297/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available by Parliamentary Constituency. However, the number of applicants on the social housing waiting list for the area covered by the Housing Executive's Belfast East District Office is as follows:

- 1130 applicants at 31st March 2007
- 1969 applicants at 31st March 2008
- 1895 applicants at 31st December 2008

Housing Executive

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of anti-social behaviour cases (i) reported to; and (ii) dealt with by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the West Tyrone constituency, in each of the past three years.

(AQW 5324/09)

Minister for Social Development: The number of anti social behaviour cases reported to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's District Offices in the West Tyrone constituency, for each of the calendar years 2006 to 2008, is as follows:

	2006	2007	2008
Strabane	102	49	67
Omagh	48	102	78
Total	150	151	145

In relation to (ii) all cases were investigated by the Housing Executive.

Social Housing

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the former Ministry of Defence properties bought by her Department and used for social housing in (i) Newtownabbey II; and (ii) Antrim District Housing Executive areas. (AQW 5331/09)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has not purchased any former Ministry of Defence properties within the areas in question. My officials are continuing to work with the Ministry of Defence to identify sites which may meet social housing need.

Social Security Agency

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development when she will decide on the Strategic Business Review of the Social Security Agency. (AQW 5354/09)

Minister for Social Development: As I have stated previously, the Strategic Business Review proposals are currently subject to ongoing public consultation which, on current plans, will run until late April 2009, and final decisions will not be made until the responses have been fully considered.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Shop

Ms S Ramsey asked the Assembly Commission what the criteria is to (i) sell; or (ii) display items in the Assembly shop. (AQW 5367/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Neeson): I refer the Member to the response in relation to AQW 4442/09:

At present, there are two distinguishing types of products supplied to the Assembly Gift Shop, details of which are set out below:

- (i) Items that are purchased by our contractor, Eurest, for sale in the Gift Shop. These are purchased with the agreement of Facilities Branch, and are usually bespoke items that contain the Assembly blue flax crest, and are therefore extremely popular amongst the many visitors who attend Parliament Buildings each year. The Eurest policy on the procurement of gifts is that those for retail sale are procured from local companies where possible thereby maximizing employment for local people. Most gifts are manufactured or processed within N.I.
- (ii) Items that are brought in by local crafters. In May 2008, Facilities Branch introduced an initiative whereby we contacted local enterprise agencies to ascertain whether local crafters would be interested in displaying their merchandise in the Assembly Gift Shop on a month by month basis. This has proved extremely popular, and is currently due to run until April 2009, when Facilities Branch will assess the success of the initiative. All crafters who have displayed their items are local businesses from Northern Ireland, and come from various constituencies.

Rental Valuation Process

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to assess the rental valuation process for all MLA constituency offices to which relatives of elected members are connected. (AQW 5532/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr A Maginness): The Assembly Commission is considering the rental valuation of MLA constituency offices as part of its deliberations on the recommendations contained in the recently published SSRB report.

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Department for Regional Development

A26 Glarryford to A44 Drones Road Dualling	203
A32 Between Omagh and Enniskillen	207
A32 Between Omagh and Enniskillen	207
Airport Bus	200
Boa Island Road (A47) at Commons, Belleek	206
Bus Shelters	202
Departmental Staff with Disabilities	206
Department's Western Division	208
Enniskillen to Sligo Road	206
Fuel Costs	198
Gritting Services	198
Gritting Services	199
Hedged Fuel Purchasing Agreement	198
Hillhead Road, Newry	206
New Trains	206
Northern Ireland Water	209
Parking Meters	201
Public Transport	201
Rathgael Road, Bangor	204
School Bus Routes	203
School Bus Routes	203
School Bus Routes	205
School Bus Routes	205
Traffic Management	199
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