
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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Ritchie, Ms Margaret (South Down)
Robinson, George (East Londonderry)
Robinson, Mrs Iris (Strangford)
Robinson, Ken (East Antrim)
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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 6 March 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Civil Service

Mr A Attwood asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of civil service staff employed by its Department, broken down by (i) grade; (ii) core departmental staff; and (iii) agency workers, at (a) May 2007; and (b) January 2009. (AQW 4850/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The table below sets out the number and grades of staff employed within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Grades	Position@1 May 2007	Position@ 5 February 2009
Senior Civil Service	26	26
Grade 6	4	3
Grade 7	43	47
Deputy Principal	61	76
Staff Officer	83	73
Executive Officer 1	37	27
Executive Officer 2	55	56
Administrative Officer	67	65
Administrative Assistant	28	23
Total	404	396

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has no agencies.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline its role in progressing Project Kelvin; whether OFMDFM has been working with the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment on the project, and to outline any discussions it has held on the project in the North/South Ministerial Council. (AQW 4921/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the decision making process or the EU State Aid application in relation to Project Kelvin, which is a joint Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)/Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) project, part-funded through INTERREG 1V.

There has been no Executive consideration of Project Kelvin. The project has been taken forward jointly by DETI and DCENR.

DETI provided periodical updates on this project to OFMDFM as part of our Department's work on the North West Gateway Initiative. These updates included a brief summary of the economic development rationale for the project and the fact that it would benefit the North West Gateway Initiative area, which includes the District Council areas of Derry, Strabane, Limavady and Donegal. The DETI updates to OFMDFM did not include specific information on the decisions to place the landing station in Portrush and the telehouse in Coleraine.

At the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in Plenary format on 23 January 2009, a number of Ministers referred to Project Kelvin. There have been no other discussions on this matter at meetings of the North South Ministerial Council.

Questions relating to the decision making process on this Project, the EU State Aid application and the joint understanding of the Project with the Irish government should be directed to DETI.

Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Executive and the Irish Government had a shared understanding of the rationale and legal basis for public funding of Project Kelvin; and to outline its understanding of (i) the main economic development rationale for public sector investment in the project; and (ii) the decision to place the landing station in Portrush and the telehouse in Coleraine.

(AQW 4924/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the decision making process or the EU State Aid application in relation to Project Kelvin, which is a joint Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)/Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) project, part-funded through INTERREG 1V.

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Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the application for approval for EU state aid for Project Kelvin, if Coleraine was mentioned either in the application or in the European Commission decision on state aid approval.

(AQW 4925/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the decision making process or the EU State Aid application in relation to Project Kelvin, which is a joint Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)/Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) project, part-funded through INTERREG 1V.

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Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the European Commission decision on state aid, in relation to Project Kelvin, specifically named the Derry/Londonderry city, Donegal, Limavady and Strabane as the North West Region in defining the area to benefit from Project Kelvin. (AQW 4926/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the decision making process or the EU State Aid application in relation to Project Kelvin, which is a joint Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)/Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) project, part-funded through INTERREG 1V.

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Project Kelvin

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the North West Gateway Initiative was the region specified to benefit from Project Kelvin; and to confirm whether Coleraine forms part of the North West Gateway Initiative. (AQW 4928/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister had no role in the decision making process or the EU State Aid application in relation to Project Kelvin, which is a joint Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)/Department of Communication, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR) project, part-funded through INTERREG 1V.

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Questions relating to the decision making process on this Project, the EU State Aid application and the joint understanding of the Project with the Irish government should be directed to DETI.

10 Day Prompt Payment Pledge

Dr S Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if its Department and all its agencies and bodies, are complying with the 10 day prompt payment pledge. (AQW 4969/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM and its sponsored bodies are taking all possible steps to pay suppliers in respect of valid invoices as promptly as possible and in line with the 10-day target.

Lifetime Opportunities

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the version of Lifetime Opportunities ratified by the Executive will be published. (AQW 5124/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 20 November 2008 the Executive agreed to formally adopt the broad architecture and principles of 'Lifetime Opportunities' as the basis of its strategy to tackle poverty and Social Inclusion.

'Lifetime Opportunities', Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, was published following its launch by the then Secretary of State, Peter Hain, in November 2006. The strategy is available on the Departmental website and hard copies can be obtained from the central Anti-Poverty Unit in OFMDFM. However, we will continue to review and refine this report in light of current economic development.

Child Poverty

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what work has been undertaken to address poor educational achievement and low aspirations in relation to child poverty; and when proposals for action on this issue will be brought forward. (AQW 5126/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is our view that the best way out of poverty is a job with a reasonable wage. Better educational achievement, aided by higher educational aspirations is an essential part of this.

Through its Public Service Agreements, the Executive has agreed challenging targets for raising standards and for reducing the gap in achievement that persists between those least and most advantaged.

As part of the Executive's strategy to tackle child poverty we will continue to focus on how best to improve the educational attainment of our children. Although this is an area of policy which largely rests with the Department of Education, it is also under active consideration by this department and at the Ministerial Sub-Committee on children and young people. We are also working closely with Atlantic Philanthropies and Barnados on a key project examining this issue.

We are soon to convene the first meeting of the new Ministerial Sub-Committee on Anti-Poverty. The Committee will be working in line with the life-cycle approach of tackling poverty and the issue of how to achieve higher educational achievement and aspirations will be a key issue for discussion.

Migrant Workers

Dr S Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps the Executive is taking to ensure equality provisions are upheld for migrant workers during the economic downturn. (AQW 5172/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Section 75(1) of the NI Act 1998 requires all designated public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine categories including racial group. Section 75(2) also requires designated public authorities to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. These duties apply at all times including during periods of economic downturn.

Although the Executive has no formal statutory enforcement role in relation to Section 75 of Northern Ireland Act 1998 it is committed to observing the duties arising under Section 75 and playing an active role in ensuring compliance with the legislation. OFMDFM also funds the Equality Commission which has the role of ensuring monitoring of compliance and also offering support and advice to individual groups.

Additionally, 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 also implements the European 'Race Directive' (Council Directive 2000/43/EC) here.

The Order makes it unlawful to discriminate, either directly or indirectly on racial grounds in the areas of employment and training; education; the provision of goods, facilities or services; the disposal and management of premises and advertisements. It also places a statutory duty on district councils to make appropriate arrangements with a view to ensuring that its various functions are carried out with due regard to the need:

- (a) to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and
- (b) to promote equality of opportunity, and good relations, between persons of different racial groups.

It is through this legislation and associated mechanisms that the Executive ensures that equality provisions are being upheld for migrant workers during an economic downturn.

Investment Strategy

Mr S Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what impact the current economic downturn will have on the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland in the next three years.

(AQO 2160/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Despite the difficulties caused by the economic downturn, departments are expected to bring significant levels of capital works to the market as set out in their Investment Delivery Plans.

Work is being taken forward to consider the key factors that may affect deliverability. We are aware that the potential impacts of the economic downturn on the Investment Strategy include, for example, a decline in site acquisition costs and easing of inflationary pressures.

Play and Leisure Policy

Mr R Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many folders were produced; and (ii) the cost of each folder for the policy statement 'Play and Leisure Policy for Northern Ireland' .

(AQW 5334/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: 1000 binders and inserts were produced and each binder cost £3.66 in total. It was decided to use a loose-leaf binder format which would allow for the insertion of the Implementation Plans and further documents when produced at minimal cost. This will be more cost-effective than producing separate printed documents and will allow recipients to retain related information in one place over the lifetime of the Implementation Plans.

Investment Strategy

Mr S Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline all infrastructure projects planned for the Strangford constituency via the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland, during this Assembly term; and the monetary value of each investment.

(AQW 5459/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Please find the information you requested in Annex A. Projects of £0.5m or more have been listed separately. In some cases it has been necessary to include the full value of projects covering an area greater than Strangford and where costs cannot be disaggregated by constituency.

Information has been provided up to the end of 2010-11 which is the term of the present Budget. The period beyond 2010-11 in the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland is indicative and details of possible expenditure at constituency level are not available.

ANNEX A

ISNI PROJECTS OF £500,000 & OVER IN STRANGFORD CONSTITUENCY UP TO THE END OF 2011

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department of Education	Glastry College Ballyhalbert	£12.5m (Estimated)	New school Building
Department of Education	St Joseph's Primary School Carryduff	£5.4m (Estimated)	New school Building
Department for Employment & Learning	South Eastern Regional College Newtownards	£4.85m	New Further Education College
Department of Agriculture & Rural Development	Special Environmental Projects (SEPs)	SEP funding available to NICMS participants is profiled as £2.37 million for 09/10 and £4.032 million for 10/11 (including EU funding).	SEPs are an integral part of the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS).
Department of Agriculture & Rural Development	Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority – Portavogie Harbour Works	Total value of works estimated between £0.7m and £1.1m	Through funding from European Fisheries Fund to undertake a series of capital Improvements at Portavogie Harbour including sediment remediation, outer pier and quay wall repair, fish market refurbishment, and small vessel pontoon facility.

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department for Regional Development	Ballywalter Wastewater Treatment Works	£1.9m	Northern Ireland Water does not hold details of capital infrastructure projects broken down by parliamentary constituency. Projects listed below are within the Ards Borough Council Area which covers most of the Strangford constituency.
Department for Regional Development	Portaferry Wastewater Treatment Works	£5.3m	
Department for Regional Development	Cloughy Wastewater Treatment Works	£1.5m	
Department for Regional Development	Ballyhalbert Wastewater Treatment Works	£3.6m	
Department for Regional Development	Portaferry Drainage Area Plan	£0.6m	
Department for Regional Development	Portavogie Wastewater Treatment Works	£1.9m	
Department for Regional Development	Millisle Drainage Area Plan	£1.3m	
Department for Regional Development	Ballygowan Wastewater Treatment Works	£3.4m	
Department for Regional Development	Ards North Zone Watermain Improvements	£3.7m	
Department for Regional Development	Ballygowan Zone Watermain Improvements	£3.4m	
Department for Regional Development	Ards North Zone Watermain Improvements	£3.7m	
Department for Regional Development	Ballygowan Zone Watermain Improvements	£3.4m	
Department for Regional Development	Frederick Street Link Newtownards	£2.4m (Estimated)	

Department	Project Title	Value	Comments
Department for Regional Development	Newtownards Southern Distributer Road	£14m (Estimated)	Under Construction
Department for Social Development	Ards Development Bureau and Community Network	£1.10m	Modernisation Fund Capital
Department for Social Development	Bowtown Phase 1 Environmental Improvement scheme	£0.85m	
Department for Social Development	Bowtown Phase 2 Environmental Improvement	£1.01m	
Department of Culture Arts & Leisure	Building Sport Programme - Down District Council	£1.275m	
Department of Culture Arts & Leisure	Newtownards Replacement Library –	Not available	No costs available at this stage

ISNI PROJECTS UNDER £500,000 IN STRANGFORD CONSTITUENCY UP TO THE END OF 2011

Department	Projects	Group Value	Comments
Department for Regional Development	Roads	£1.02m (Estimated)	Per Year
Department for Regional Development	Small wastewater infrastructure improvement projects	£1.3m	
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety	South Eastern Trust Refurbishment Schemes	£0.39m	
Department for Social Development	Peninsula Healthy Living	£0.62m	Modernisation Fund Capital

Gender Equality Panel

Mr P Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what organisations and government Departments are represented on the Gender Equality Panel. (AQW 5467/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Terms of reference for the Gender Advisory Panel ensure that membership is sufficiently broad to cover all the issues relevant to the Gender Equality Strategy. They include an additional undertaking that officials will also maintain contacts across the voluntary and community sector as required.

The Gender Advisory Panel is chaired by a senior OFMDFM official and representation is from a range of organisations as follows:

- Coalition on Sexual Orientation
- Disability Action
- Equality Commission Northern Ireland
- Family Planning Association NI
- Women's Forum NI
- NIC/ICTU
- Lesbian Advocacy Services Initiative
- NI Rural Women's Network
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
- Northern Ireland Women's European Platform
- Older Women's Network
- The Men's Project
- Women's Resource and Development Agency

- Women's Support Network
- Youth Action
- Youth Action
- Men's Action Network
- CBI
- Women's National Commission
- Women's Aid Federation NI

The Gender Advisory Panel met in January 2009 and is due to meet again in April 2009. We and the junior Ministers also continue to maintain an awareness of issues and concerns through various meetings and events involving representative organisations.

Executive's Office in Brussels

Mr S Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what was the cost of running the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels in each of the last three years. (AQW 5477/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Costs for each of the last three complete financial years are:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
£512,218	£546,827	£529,838

This does not include the costs of the DARD policy officer, which fall to DARD, or the costs incurred by InvestNI in relation to their staff co-located with the OFMDFM team in the Brussels office.

Child Poverty

Mr A Ross asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many children were considered to be living in child poverty, broken down by constituency, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 5481/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: There are three measures used – 'relative income' poverty, 'absolute income' poverty and 'mixed relative income and material deprivation' poverty. Relative income poverty is the number of children living in households whose income is below 60% of the UK median income.

The tables below show the number of children living in households experiencing relative income poverty by Parliamentary Constituency in three year bands from 2002/03 – 2004/05; 2003/04 – 2005/06 and 2004/05 – 2006/07. Data has been combined in this way in order to improve the reliability of the figures.

Child Poverty by Parliamentary Constituency, 2004/05 - 2006/07						
Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	%	Confidence Intervals			
Belfast East	1,900	2%	+/-	114	6%	
Belfast North	5,700	5%	+/-	384	7%	
Belfast South	1,400	1%	+/-	63	4%	
Belfast West	7,700	7%	+/-	439	6%	
East Antrim	4,500	4%	+/-	272	6%	
East Londonderry	4,100	4%	+/-	272	7%	
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	7,600	7%	+/-	446	6%	
Foyle	10,100	10%	+/-	489	5%	

Child Poverty by Parliamentary Constituency, 2004/05 - 2006/07					
Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	%	Confidence Intervals		
Lagan Valley	3,500	3%	+/-	130	4%
Mid Ulster	9,300	9%	+/-	482	5%
Newry And Armagh	7,100	7%	+/-	363	5%
North Antrim	6,000	6%	+/-	291	5%
North Down	5,100	5%	+/-	271	5%
South Antrim	5,300	5%	+/-	241	5%
South Down	8,800	8%	+/-	439	5%
Strangford	5,900	6%	+/-	325	6%
Upper Bann	6,400	6%	+/-	334	5%
West Tyrone	3,200	3%	+/-	170	5%
Total	103,700	100%	+/-	1,327	1%

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

Child Poverty by Parliamentary Constituency, 2003/04 - 2005/06					
Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	%	Confidence Intervals		
Belfast East	2,000	2%	+/-	123	6%
Belfast North	5,100	5%	+/-	329	6%
Belfast South	2,600	2%	+/-	156	6%
Belfast West	5,800	5%	+/-	314	5%
East Antrim	4,100	4%	+/-	231	6%
East Londonderry	5,400	5%	+/-	321	6%
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	9,000	8%	+/-	493	5%
Foyle	12,400	11%	+/-	604	5%
Lagan Valley	2,400	2%	+/-	82	3%
Mid Ulster	7,700	7%	+/-	430	6%
Newry And Armagh	7,300	7%	+/-	371	5%
North Antrim	7,800	7%	+/-	381	5%
North Down	4,400	4%	+/-	232	5%
South Antrim	5,900	5%	+/-	262	4%
South Down	9,000	8%	+/-	417	5%
Strangford	6,200	6%	+/-	357	6%
Upper Bann	5,800	5%	+/-	277	5%
West Tyrone	5,200	5%	+/-	288	6%
Total	108,200	100%	+/-	1,369	1%

Source: Households Below Average Income, NI 2003/04, 2004/05, 2005/06

Child Poverty By Parliamentary Constituency, 2002/03 - 2004/05					
Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	%	Confidence Intervals		
Belfast East	3,100	3%	+/-	228	7%

Child Poverty By Parliamentary Constituency, 2002/03 - 2004/05					
Parliamentary Constituency	Children in Poverty	%	Confidence Intervals		
Belfast North	6,200	6%	+/-	405	7%
Belfast South	2,100	2%	+/-	118	6%
Belfast West	7,700	7%	+/-	428	6%
East Antrim	3,500	3%	+/-	185	5%
East Londonderry	7,800	7%	+/-	461	6%
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	8,300	8%	+/-	420	5%
Foyle	10,400	10%	+/-	529	5%
Lagan Valley	2,900	3%	+/-	129	4%
Mid Ulster	7,200	7%	+/-	449	6%
Newry And Armagh	5,800	5%	+/-	304	5%
North Antrim	6,800	6%	+/-	296	4%
North Down	3,800	3%	+/-	187	5%
South Antrim	5,600	5%	+/-	246	4%
South Down	7,600	7%	+/-	340	4%
Strangford	5,700	5%	+/-	306	5%
Upper Bann	7,800	7%	+/-	357	5%
West Tyrone	6,600	6%	+/-	404	6%
Total	108,800	100%	+/-	1,379	1%

Source: Households Below Average Income, NI 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05

Economic Research Institute

Mr D McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Executive discussed and reached a conclusion on the Economic Research Institute of Northern Ireland document 'Mitigating the Recession: Options for the Northern Ireland Executive' dated Feb 2009. (AQW 5511/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We understand that this is a draft ERINI research paper presented by its Director to the Regional Development Committee and the Finance and Personnel Committee of the Assembly on 18 February. It has not been formally published or submitted to us for consideration and has consequently not been discussed by the Executive.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) what the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of its current policies and practices; and (ii) what changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to its Department's responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn. (AQW 5535/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have taken the lead in developing the Executive's response to the economic downturn and credit crunch. At a departmental level the most marked impact of the current crisis has been in areas operating in non-sterling areas such as the Brussels Office and the Washington Bureau. However, through careful management of resources it has been possible to maintain the level of service delivery.

The department has modified the role and responsibilities of its Economic Policy Unit to enable it to act in support of Ministers in determining and monitoring a co-ordinated Executive response to the economic crisis.

The “credit crunch” has become a standing item of Executive business and we are continuing with a series of meetings and initiatives to protect the interests of local people and businesses in these difficult economic times.

We have said on a number of occasions that the priorities set out in our Programme for Government remain valid. In particular our decision to make the economy our top priority was well made, and ever more firmly justified in the new economic circumstances.

Investment Strategy

Dr S Farry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on the current status of the Investment Strategy figures. (AQW 5538/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In these challenging economic times we are fully focused on delivering the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. We have been in regular contact with Investment Strategy stakeholders, including the Construction Employers Federation and others, to explore options to alleviate the impact of the economic downturn and have made some £33 million available for construction-related expenditure as part of an Executive Credit Crunch Package. £9.4 million of ISNI funding has been brought forward into the current financial year.

Substantial progress is being made with expenditure this year and we are still on course to achieve a record in excess of £1.4bn.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr G Savage asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the yearly cost of the Strategic Investment Board. (AQW 5550/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The operational costs of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) in 2007/8 were some £4.189 million. The SIB also provided assistance to departments in obtaining specialist advisory services in support of Investment Strategy projects at a total cost of £3.087 million.

It is anticipated that the cost of running the SIB in this financial year will be in the region of £3.3 million, whilst a further £3.9 million will be spent on advisory services to assist departments in further progressing Investment Strategy projects.

Increasing the Usage of E-mail

Mr P Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to reduce the amount of paper documentation and to increase the usage of e-mail. (AQW 5613/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM’s staff have access to modern electronic IT equipment and facilities and the Department seeks to make best use of technology to reduce the volume of hard copy paper documents.

Staff have been using e-mail systems since the creation of OFMDFM in 1999. Since then, an ever increasing use has been made of this medium to transmit business communications. This has corresponded with a dramatic decrease in the issue of internal and external correspondence in paper format during this period.

An electronic documents and records management system (TRIM) was introduced in 2008. This is a key element of the wider NICS Reform Programme. In addition to improving the way in which our staff work, the TRIM system is facilitating a very significant reduction in the use and retention of documents in paper format. TRIM now holds the official record of departmental business, meaning that registered paper files are no longer created.

OFMDFM’s sustainable development policy includes a commitment to use less paper more sustainably and to support electronic document management. The printing of documents is discouraged, unless required for business purposes.

The Department of Finance and Personnel is currently developing a sustainable Information Communication Technology policy for the NICS. This is due to issue in the summer of 2009.

Ten Day Payment Target

Mr S Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the total amount due to suppliers has been paid within the ten day payment target. (AQW 5641/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister:

OFMDFM has paid £1.504 million to suppliers within the ten-day payment target. This information is detailed, by month, in the table below.

	Value of invoices paid (£'000s)	Value of invoices paid within 10 day target (£'000s)	%
Dec-08	£794	£468	59%
Jan-09	£893	£646	72%
Feb 2009 to date	£663	£390	59%
Total	£2,350	£1,504	64%

Reducing Stress in the Workplace

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that stress is the primary reason for absence at work, to outline what actions the Department intends to bring forward to increase motivation and morale and reduce stress in the workplace. (AQW 5646/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Psychiatric and psychological illnesses, which include stress, anxiety and depression, are the main reasons for long-term sickness absence in the Department and across the wider Northern Ireland Civil Service.

We recognise that such illnesses, whether work-related or not, can lead to long-term absence from work. Measures are in place to help staff who experience such difficulties, including welfare support services and an employee assistance programme, which is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for staff and their immediate family members.

Early intervention in such cases is considered essential and immediate referral to the Occupational Health Service can be made when required.

Consideration is being given to undertaking an NICS-wide stress survey. It is hoped that the results of the survey will help inform and influence policy direction and target 'hotspots'.

Civil Service

Mr J Dallat asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the recent appointment of the former head of the Civil Service to the board of the Ulster Bank was cleared through the appropriate procedures. (AQW 5780/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The recent appointment of the former Head of the Civil Service to the Board of the Ulster Bank was cleared through the appropriate procedures. Sir Nigel Hamilton complied with the requirement in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Code that any member of the Senior Civil Service who, within two years of retirement, proposes to take up paid employment, should obtain the prior agreement of his former employing Department before taking up such appointments. This is in keeping with the conditions which also apply to the GB Civil Service.

In line with the guidance of the GB Civil Service Advisory Committee on Business Appointments which provides advice on such appointments in Northern Ireland, Sir Nigel served a six-month period of grace (the normal period required to elapse) between leaving his post as Head of the Civil Service and taking up his post as Non Executive Director on the Board of Ulster Bank. In addition, in line with the Advisory Committee's advice, Sir Nigel has agreed that he will not lobby Ministers or officials on behalf of the bank or its clients until he had been retired one year.

Equality Commission

Mr J Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £1m in awards from tribunals on discrimination cases taken by the Equality Commission came from public money. (AQW 5784/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland was consulted on this and it has confirmed that none of the £1m in awards from tribunals on discrimination cases taken by the Equality Commission came from public money. All compensation awarded to claimants by a tribunal decision in 2007/08 was in respect of cases involving private sector organisations only. All compensation paid to claimants in cases brought against public sector bodies was paid on foot of a settlement, not as consequence of an award from a tribunal.

Equality Commission

Mr J Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if clients pay any of the legal fees for cases referred to a tribunal by the Equality Commission. (AQW 5785/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: An individual who believes they have been the victim of unlawful discrimination and who decides to pursue their complaint by way of litigation may apply to the Equality Commission for legal assistance with their claim. Where an application to the Equality Commission for assistance to pursue a case of discrimination is granted legal assistance, this will include all legal costs incurred in the litigation from the grant of assistance. Assistance is granted in stages and is subject to review. Assistance in a case may be reviewed on a number of occasions in accordance with the Equality Commission's Legal Enforcement Policy and the complainant's condition of offer of assistance. An officer of the Commission will carry out all investigatory and legal work and the grant of assistance will cover any fees to a barrister.

Monitoring Rounds

Mr S Hamilton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money it has surrendered in the quarterly monitoring rounds. (AQO 2171/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has surrendered a total of £7.825 million of resource expenditure and £8.268 million of capital in the 2008/09 financial year.

These easements are broken down as follows:

- In the June 2008 Monitoring Round, OFMDFM surrendered £0.2 million resource expenditure.
- In the September 2008 Monitoring Round, OFMDFM surrendered £0.42 million of resource expenditure and £1.89 million of capital.
- In the December 2008 Monitoring Round, OFMDFM surrendered £5.929 million of resource expenditure and £5.978 million of capital.
- In the February 2009 Monitoring Round, OFMDFM surrendered £1.276 million of resource expenditure and £0.4 million of capital.

Child Poverty

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in developing targets and indicators on child poverty and when these will be published. (AQO 2172/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government very clearly outlines the Executive's targets for reducing Child Poverty including severe child poverty. In particular the Executive committed to work towards the elimination of child poverty in Northern Ireland by 2020 and reduce child poverty by 50% by 2010. It further committed to work towards the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012.

The Executive reaffirmed its commitment to these targets when it adopted the broad architecture of Lifetime Opportunities as its Strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

All our targets are measured against a baseline and monitored on a periodic basis in accordance with the relevant treasury guidelines. We have therefore built up a robust set of information on all three poverty measurements – relative, absolute and the mixed measure. The Executive Sub-Committee on Poverty and Social Inclusion will play an important role in assessing this information.

It will be the responsibility of this Committee to agree new priorities and key Executive actions to meet these targets. It is important to note that some key actions will be driven by central Government on a UK-wide basis.

This work will supplement the work of the Ministerial Sub-Group on Children, where Child Poverty is a particular focus. The issue of the lack of affordable childcare which gives rise to a barrier to employment, will be the subject of specific recommendations which we expect to see and consult on in the coming weeks.

Public Money: Consultancy Spend

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the public money it has spent on consultants given its failure to appoint new non Executive Directors to the Strategic Investment Board. (AQO 2173/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are currently considering the outcome of a competition to appoint non-executive directors to the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). Positions on SIB require individuals with relevant high calibre experience and proven ability at top management level in the public or private sectors. We decided it appropriate in this case, not least against the background of the unprecedented level of capital investment in public infrastructure that the SIB has a key role in supporting, to seek outside professional assistance with the recruitment process and a firm of executive recruitment specialists was appointed with the aim of establishing a suitable field of candidates for our consideration.

The cost of engaging consultants was £48,600 excluding the cost of advertising.

Lloyds/HBOS

Mr E Poots asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations have been made to Lloyds HBOS in relation to retaining jobs. (AQO 2174/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 25 September 2008, we wrote to the Chief Executive of Lloyds TSB, Eric Daniels to register our strong interest to ensure that the position of local jobs was protected in the planned acquisition of HBOS.

On 19 January 2009 we met with Rosa Wilkinson, the Director of Public Policy and Regulation at Lloyds TSB to discuss their proposals in more detail.

We were conscious that the terms of the acquisition originally outlined an intention to eliminate branch duplication and consolidate some head office functions. While Lloyds TSB does not have any branches in Northern Ireland, we were keen to impress on the Company the importance we attach both to the local HBOS branch network and to its customer service centre in Belfast which Invest NI originally sponsored and provides in excess of 1500 jobs.

HBOS was one of the first major financial institutions to invest in Northern Ireland and its presence here is highly valued. While the detailed outworking of the amalgamation of HBOS into Lloyds is still developing we, along with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, will keep this matter under review.

The creation and retention of job opportunities is, of course, a key priority for the Executive, and we will do all that we can to protect local jobs and engage with key investors.

Ebrington Barracks

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much money earmarked for the development of the Ebrington barracks it has surrendered in the December Monitoring Round. (AQO 2175/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Prior to the commencement of the December monitoring round, £1,830,000 was earmarked for development on the Ebrington site.

£522,000 was surrendered in the December monitoring round process. This represents a re-phasing of two major capital works projects, and any time lost will be made up in the following year.

Ilex is committed to complete all planned projects early in the next financial year.

North/South Ministerial Council: Benefits

Mr A Attwood asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the benefits provided by the workings of the North South Ministerial Council. (AQO 2176/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are committed to practical and mutually beneficial North South co-operation and the North South Ministerial Council is assisting us in taking this forward.

Financial Package

Dr A McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if all Ministers brought forward plans to stimulate the economy prior to the financial package announced on behalf of the Executive in December 2008. (AQO 2177/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: All Ministers were involved in developing and agreeing the final content of the package measures announced on 15 December 2008. In a series of Executive meetings in the run up to the announcement all Ministers were asked to put forward suggestions for measures. These were collectively assessed and evaluated in terms of their affordability, viability and effectiveness in addressing the core themes of the package. These themes were addressing energy and fuel poverty; tackling debt and unemployment; dealing with cost of living pressures; support for housing and construction; and support for business. As part of the process of identifying remedial actions the investment proposals of all departments included in the Investment Strategy were reviewed.

Section 75: Departmental Failure to Comply

Mr A McQuillan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what departmental decisions and policies have been quashed by the courts through failure to comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. (AQO 2178/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are not aware of any departmental decisions or policies that have been quashed by the courts through failure to comply with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Section 75 enforcement duties are set out in Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Public authorities are required to submit equality schemes to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Schedule 9 sets out what an equality scheme should contain. The Commission may approve schemes or refer them to the Secretary of State; it must notify the Assembly in writing about any referrals and send the Assembly a copy of the scheme. Where a scheme is referred, the Secretary of State shall: approve it; request the public authority to make a revised scheme; or make a scheme for the public authority. The Secretary of State must notify the Assembly in writing where a new scheme is requested; and must notify the Assembly in writing and provide a copy where a new scheme is made.

Strategic Investment Board: Operational Changes

Mr A McFarland asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what changes have been made to the operations of the Strategic Investment Board in light of the economic crisis. (AQO 2179/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) continues to support departments in the delivery of the Investment Strategy. This has included providing assistance to departments for projects particularly affected by the current difficulties in financial markets.

In addition the SIB has provided advice to Ministers on how delivery of the Investment Strategy could best be used to help mitigate the impact of the current economic difficulties, particularly on the construction industry.

OFMDFM: Staff Absence Levels

Mr A Ross asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many of its staff are currently off work for more than 20 days. (AQO 2180/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our most recent information indicates that four staff are currently off work on long-term absence of more than 20 days.

Investment Strategy

Mr R Newton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Investment Strategy is helping the Executive to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. (AQO 2181/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: In these challenging economic times we are fully focused on delivering the Investment Strategy. We have been in regular contact with Investment Strategy stakeholders, including the Construction Employers Federation and others, to explore options to alleviate the impact of the economic downturn and have made some £33 million available for construction-related expenditure as part of an Executive Credit Crunch Package.

As part of the Investment Strategy some £1.3bn of public construction schemes are currently on site. They include major projects in the Health Service, including RVH Critical Care, Phase 3b at Altnagelvin Hospital and Phase 2A at the Ulster Hospital; three major projects on roads, including the Westlink/M1, A1 and A4 dualling schemes; 10 waste-water projects; the Belfast sewers project; four further education projects at eight locations; and 14 major schools projects. A major programme of social housing investment is also underway. Two arts projects, Ulster Museum and Crescent Arts Centre are in addition underway.

The Strategic Investment Board has put in place a tracking system that will help us to monitor projects across the Investment Strategy and where possible, within our resources, we will expedite projects to aid the construction industry in the challenges it currently faces.

Strategic Investment Board: Work Programme

Mr J McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what changes have been made to the work programme of the Strategic Investment Board in light of the economic crisis. (AQO 2182/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) continues to support departments in the delivery of the Investment Strategy. This has included providing assistance to departments for projects particularly affected by the current difficulties in financial markets.

In addition the SIB has provided advice to Ministers on how delivery of the Investment Strategy could best be used to help mitigate the impact of the current economic difficulties, particularly on the construction industry.

Strategic Investment Board: Consultancy Spend

Mr P Maskey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much was paid to consultants for recruiting up to four new non-executive directors to the Strategic Investment Board. (AQO 2184/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Consultants were paid £48,600 in respect of work carried out on this recruitment competition.

Foreign Investment

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is being done to encourage foreign investment to remain in Northern Ireland. (AQO 2185/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The economy is our top priority and we are fully committed to encouraging major global corporations to invest, grow and reinvest. Building on the successful

Investment Conference in May 2008, we visited the United States last December and delivered a very powerful message to corporate America, showcasing the wealth of opportunity that exists here for US business.

We are continuing to work closely with InvestNI and our offices in Washington and Brussels in supporting existing and new foreign investment and ensuring that the damage caused by the current economic crisis is kept to a minimum.

We are planning an extensive programme of visits to US cities this month focusing on consolidating existing investors and in attracting new inward investment. Our itinerary will include face to face meetings with top executives from the IT, manufacturing and film production industries in Chicago, Silicon Valley and Los Angeles. We will be reminding American companies that we can provide an excellent opportunity for business, offering a highly competitive cost environment with operating costs at a significantly lower level than our competitors in the UK and Europe. Trade Minister Arlene Foster has just returned from a major Trade Mission to the Netherlands where she discussed how to improve business between us and the Netherlands.

We will be reinforcing the message, that despite the global economic downturn, we remain very much open for business.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Businesses

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm and rural businesses her Department has supported in the Upper Bann constituency in the past three years; and to indicate the amount of the investment in each case. (AQW 5223/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): 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

Animal Welfare

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she is going to bring animal welfare legislation up to UK standards; and when she intends to publish her legislative proposals. (AQW 5224/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Review of Animal Welfare legislation in the north is drawing to a close.

I will shortly be examining all the evidence presented to me. I will then consider the scope and the timetable for new legislation, in line with the resources that are available.

Ecological Management and Conservation Biology

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if he will investigate his Department's refusal to fund the students studying Ecological Management and Conservation Biology for one year courses, in the current academic year. (AQW 5243/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: In the current academic year my Department has not received applications for funding from students studying Ecological Management and Conservation Biology. Neither have any refusals been issued.

In the academic year 2007/08 there was provision for 2 MSc and 8 PhD Studentships to be awarded under our Postgraduate Competition. Applicants had to meet eligibility criteria and undergo a selection process, which

included a panel interview. During the 07/08 academic year and preceding years students wishing to study for an MSc in Ecological Management and Conservation Biology were eligible to apply for a studentship. Awards were not exclusive to this subject and the competition included other agricultural and food related MSc programmes.

Prior to the current financial year my department was faced with a particularly difficult challenge of prioritising a wide range of work programmes aimed at meeting the needs of stakeholders, within a limited budget. As part of a range of financial measures, I announced on 21 March 2008 that no new postgraduate MSc Studentship Awards would be offered for the academic year 2008/09.

In the current academic year my Department is funding 24 PhD research studentships under our Postgraduate scheme. These projects contribute to our Strategic Vision and Goals. No funding is available for MSc studentships under this scheme.

Farm Businesses

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the criteria set by her Department for issuing business numbers; and to clarify where these criteria are published. (AQW 5274/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As a Paying Agency the Department is required to ensure that each recipient of European subsidy or grant has a unique identification number, that all payments to the same business can be associated and that artificial conditions, such as multiple identities, are not created for the fraudulent obtaining of grant or subsidy.

The Department may issue a farm business identification number if two criteria are satisfied, (a) there is a farming activity by the business and (b) it is separate from any other farm business.

To assess if the business is separate the Department seeks information on legal status, economic activity, structure/organisation, membership, relationships with other farm businesses, and commercial and operational arrangements. Applicants are asked to provide such information in the format set out on form FBI and reference to this is made in the annual SAF packs.

Europe has introduced similar requirements to apply to those applicants for rural development funding who are not already farm businesses. Consequentially a separate class of identification numbers for such funding applicants has been introduced to facilitate the delivery of the new rural development programme. A business identify number will be awarded if the rural business (or project) is separate from any farm business or any other rural business. Information is sought in the form included in the rural development application packs.

The Department is finalising an explanatory leaflet about business identification numbers which it proposes to issue in the near future

Farm Businesses

Mr T Elliott asked he Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the total number of farm businesses. (AQW 5278/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There are 46,569 businesses in the north of Ireland recorded on the Grants & Subsidies computer database. Of these, some 41,600 have activated entitlements under Single Farm Payment (SFP). The remainder includes producers who are no longer active, rural development applicants, legacy subsidy scheme producers and other producers not in receipt of SFP.

Farm Businesses

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm businesses have a unique business number but share a herd number with other farms. (AQW 5279/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A check by the Department indicates there are no farm businesses which share a herd number with others. Checks and controls are in place to ensure that a herd number can only be allocated to one farm business.

Farm Businesses

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what are the criteria for issuing herd numbers; and where are they published. (AQW 5280/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A new applicant wishing to receive a herd number must meet the following criteria:

- Be aged 18 or over;
- Not be an existing registered keeper of animals of that species;
- Assume responsibility for compliance with legislation in respect of identification, registration and movement requirements;
- Provide proof of access to land, such as a Solicitor's letter or agreements from auctioneer/letting agent.
- Have a planned location for keeping them including proper stock handling facilities and a building suitable for isolating animals.

If there is any likelihood that the new herd is going to be associated with an existing herd, the application will be rejected.

When the application meets all the above criteria an Animal Health and Welfare Inspector conducts an initial visit and interviews the applicant. If the criteria are not met or there are other problems with the application, the application will be returned.

Following a satisfactory inspection by Veterinary Service, the applicant's case is referred to Grants and Subsidies Branch for consideration of a Farm Business Number.

Only after a farm business number is granted, will a herd or flock number be issued

Details of the above process is not currently published, but DARD officials are currently drafting an explanatory booklet covering herd numbers and business identity numbers for issue to all current livestock farmers and potential applicants for grants or subsidies .

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many projects have been submitted to her Department by Queen's University, Belfast; and the University of Ulster about Bovine Tuberculosis in each of the last ten years; and to detail how many were refused funding and the reasons for refusal. (AQW 5316/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No projects have been submitted by either University over the past ten years.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many projects have been submitted to her Department by the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute about Bovine Tuberculosis; to detail how many were refused funding and the reasons for refusal, in each year since the organisation was created. (AQW 5317/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Between the establishment of the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) in April 2006 and present, AFBI has submitted three projects on bovine TB to DARD in 2006.

No projects have been refused.

Fishing Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she can confirm that there will be help for the fishing industry if the EU changes the mesh size. (AQW 5344/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The European Fisheries Fund Regulation (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1198/2006) allows the Department to pay grant contribution for the first replacement of gear if new technical standards are introduced. Grant would normally only be payable if a person made the investment to switch to the new gear before the requirements become mandatory.

The particular circumstances are set out in Article 25 (8) of the EFF Regulation.

Fishing Industry

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people in the fisheries industry have experienced skin problems from wearing rubber gloves since their use was introduced for health and safety reasons. (AQW 5345/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department does not hold information on the health of workers in the fishing industry.

Water Levels at Clay Loughs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps he is taking to control water levels at Clay Loughs in Killyleagh. (AQW 5347/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Responsibility for the maintenance of water levels at Clea (Clay) Lakes rests with the current landowners, Dunbia.

Rivers Agency, in conjunction with its legal advisers, is taking forward the transfer of rights from Dunbia to the Agency.

Converting Land to Forest

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on her Department's progress in converting 1,650 hectares of land to forest. (AQW 5351/09)

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 NI Executive Programme for Government 2008-2011. This year we are likely to fall short of our milestone of 550 hectares for 2008/2009 because of the difficult economic conditions and the strong commitment of landowners to keep farming. However, we have introduced, or are about to introduce, the following initiatives to increase uptake over the following two years and beyond:

- Seeking to amend the current Farm Woodland Premium Scheme so that more farmers can access its annual payments.
- Placing greater emphasis on the promotion and marketing of all forestry grant schemes.
- Reviewing the barriers to increasing woodland cover and how these can be overcome.
- Publicising changes in the Single Farm Payment system that will benefit those considering new afforestation.

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

Animal Health Strategy

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the progress of the Animal Health Strategy. (AQW 5352/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Through the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), Ministers in Belfast and Dublin agreed to the development of an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy to reflect a commitment to maintaining a high animal health status where that existed and to working more closely together to eradicate disease when it occurred. An All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy is being developed, the ultimate aim of which is the free movement of animals on the Island through co-operation and the development of complementary policies.

Following presentations to the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee by DARD officials on 12 February and 26 February 2008, the draft All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy was issued for consultation with key stakeholders on 4 March 2008.

Following consultation, officials reported back to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on the responses received to the consultation at a meeting on 3 July 2008. The Committee raised a number of questions about general animal health issues, which officials responded to during the meeting and later in writing on 31 July 2008.

Following postponement of the NSMC Agriculture Sectoral meetings scheduled for 19 September 2008 and 5 February 2009, it is anticipated that Ministers will be asked to agree the draft Strategy at a forthcoming NSMC Agriculture Sectoral Meeting.

In the meantime, North-South co-operation continues through the work of nine animal health and welfare working groups set up under the NSMC arrangements. This work is underpinning the development of the All-Island Strategy.

Tuberculosis and Brucellosis

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an assessment of her Department's success in reducing the incidences of tuberculosis and brucellosis. (AQW 5353/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: TUBERCULOSIS

Since 2002, there has been clear evidence of a significant decline in the incidence of TB throughout the north of Ireland. The annual herd incidence peaked in 2002 at 9.93% and was 5.58% as at the end of December 2008. There is a key goal in the Programme for Government to reduce by 27% the incidence of TB by 2011. My assessment is that over the last 6 years we have made considerable progress and I hope that further progress will be made. Whilst over recent months there has been a levelling off in the downward trend in TB, it is too early to say that this will be a sustained change in the direction of the trend.

BRUCELLOSIS

After many years of almost complete freedom, brucellosis was detected in the north of Ireland in the late 1990s. The disease increased in incidence and reached a peak in 2002. The Dept. responded strategically with a range of measures and initiatives and the disease declined year on year, until the end of 2005. At the end of 2005 a single exceptional breakdown caused a significant number of secondary breakdown herds in 2006. This halted the encouraging downward trend.

However, in 2007 and 2008 the number of confirmed breakdowns has again dropped in response to vigorous control measures. Disease statistics to the end of December 2008 indicate that the incidence is dropping. In fact, there has not been a confirmed brucellosis breakdown in the north of Ireland during November 2008 to January 2009.

I am content with the overall progress my Department is making in the campaign to eradicate brucellosis from our cattle.

Disposal of Chicken Litter

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) when a study to investigate the various methods for the disposal of chicken litter was commissioned by her Department; and (ii) the cost of this study. (AQW 5365/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has investigated methods for the disposal of chicken litter on several occasions.

The Expert Group on Alternative Uses of Manures, (EGAUM), was convened by DARD in 2005. It reviewed technologies for processing livestock manures, including poultry litter. The group published its final report in March 2006.

In 2008, a joint working group of government officials, including representatives of my Department and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), and poultry farming representatives was established. The Group considered measures for the storage and management of poultry litter and compliance with the Nitrates Directive.

In November 2008, AFBI and DARD officials gave a presentation to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on technologies for the disposal of poultry litter. No external costs were incurred in conducting these studies.

Scientists at AFBI and DARD officials continue to monitor the development of relevant technologies on an ongoing basis.

Poultry Waste Disposal Technology

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if, in light of emerging poultry waste disposal technology, the Department will be commissioning a new study to ensure that all technologies are investigated fully and that the most environmentally, economically and technologically sound method of disposal is established and encouraged. (AQW 5366/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department, in conjunction with the Agri Food and Bio-Sciences Institute, monitors the development of emerging technology for the disposal of poultry litter on an ongoing basis.

Officials are aware of developing technologies, such as “quickwash” which are currently in the early stages of development.

My Department has no plans at present to commission further specific studies into emerging technology for the disposal of poultry litter.

However my officials will keep the option to commission further studies under review and will continue to monitor the development of technologies as a viable alternative to the land spreading of poultry litter.

Alternative technologies brought forward by industry are welcomed and will be considered by my Department.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number and percentage of employees in her Department who have disabilities. (AQW 5373/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural 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.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of her current policies and practices; and (ii) what changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to her Department’s responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn. (AQW 5405/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

(i) What the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of her current policies and practices.

My Department through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, continues to deliver its normal core programmes to the agri-food industry, including further and higher education programmes, industry training, technology transfer and benchmarking. While uptake continues to be strong, CAFRE is experiencing some difficulty due to the economic downturn in securing appropriate work placements for students on some of its food education programmes. However, it continues to liaise with the industry to ensure these placements are made. My Development Advisers report some increase in the number of financial related queries being received from farmers and growers. A significant issue affecting this sector is that the majority of them are now part-time and rely on other sources of income. Due to the downturn in the other sectors (particularly the construction sector) other sources of income for these farm families are being considerably reduced.

(ii) What changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to her Department's responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn.

In recognition of the economic downturn and with the agreement of my Executive colleagues, I am providing additional support to the fishing industry and those farmers who suffered losses as a result of the August 2008 flooding.

Assistance to Fishing Industry

My officials are currently finalising the business case for the provision of a £700k package of additional support to assist our fishing fleet through these difficult economic times. The package focuses on the payment of Light Dues, Harbour Dues and Landing Fees incurred by the local registered fishing fleet. Subject to business case approval and the introduction of implementing legislation, it is hoped to make payments to the industry before the end of March 2009.

Flooding Hardship payments

In order to address the hardship of farmers who suffered losses as a consequence of the August 2008 flooding, I secured funding from the Executive. The Executive agreed to the provision of £500,000 for 'flooding hardship in agriculture' and as a result the Flooding Hardship Scheme, was launched on 18th February, with a view to making payments to eligible farmers by the end of March 2009.

I will continue to keep under review the impact of the economic downturn and will consider the need to change existing policies or programmes including, if appropriate, modification of the Rural Development Programme.

Oldstone Road in Antrim

Mr D Burnside asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures have been taken to ensure that no further flooding occurs at the Oldstone Road in Antrim; and what long-term solutions is he proposing to counter this situation. (AQW 5407/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: General maintenance, including repairs to a culvert, has already been undertaken in the vicinity of the Sixmilewater River and Oldstone Road. In addition, my staff are continuing to provide flood emergency response and were able to reassure resident's concerns over the weekend of 31st January to 1st February 2009.

An evaluation of the performance of the existing flood defences is underway, including a review of the operation of drainage systems behind the river defences. This investigation will report and any minor works identified that would reduce flood risk will be given high priority. Looking to the longer term, a study has been instigated to assess what can be done to reduce flood risk to what is a complex problem.

My colleague, the Minister for Regional Development, has advised me that his Department's Roads Service considers the road drainage along this length of road as adequate. The gullies are routinely inspected and cleaned and, upon receipt of any severe weather warnings, staff carry out additional checks to ensure they are free from debris, as part of Roads Service's local emergency response plan.

Rural Businesses

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm and rural businesses her Department has supported; and what was the amount of investment in each case, in the North Down constituency, in the past three years. (AQW 5415/09)

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.

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Civil Service employees there are in her Department in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5520/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture & Rural Development currently employs 225 staff in Derry/Londonderry offices.

Departmental Staff

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many employees in her Department travel from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast for work. (AQW 5521/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department of Agriculture & Rural Development currently employs 4 staff who have a home address in Derry/Londonderry and who work in DARD offices located in Belfast.

Royal National Institute for the Blind

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many meetings she has had with the Royal National Institute for the Blind; and what the outcomes of the meetings were. (AQW 5565/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date I have not received any invitations to meet with the Royal National Institute for the Blind nor have I held any meetings with the Institute

Rivers Agency

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress Rivers Agency has made to alleviate flooding in Greencastle, County Down, in the interim and the long term. (AQW 5635/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Rivers Agency is in the process of carrying out site inspections of the site at Greencastle, Co Down, with a view to identifying potential maintenance works.

A feasibility study will be commissioned in April 2009 to investigate the potential for further flood alleviation works in the area.

Due to the sensitive environmental and fishery interests on the Whitewater River, full consultation will be necessary with all relevant stakeholders prior to the commencement of any maintenance works.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many application forms for the Farm Modernisation Scheme were just posted to each office. (AQW 5652/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The total number of postal applications received between the 17th February and the 20th February was 2297.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many application forms for the Farm Modernisation Scheme were just hand delivered to each office. (AQW 5653/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Between the 17th February and 20th February, the total number of applications hand delivered to each office and received over the counter, was 6563.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many application forms for the Farm Modernisation Scheme were posted and also hand delivered to each office. (AQW 5656/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I can not provide that answer for some weeks as the processing of all applications will not be completed until then. I shall write to you when that information comes available.

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide a list of all the offices that were open to receive application forms for the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5657/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD offices that accepted Farm Modernisation Programme Application Forms are:

- Kilpatrick House
38-54 High Street
BALLYMENA
BT43 6DT
- Glenree House
Carnbane Industrial Estate
NEWRY
BT35 6EF
Rathkeltair House
Market Street
DOWNPATRICK
BT30 6LZ
- Armagh Office
2 Newry Road
ARMAGH
BT60 1EN
- Coleraine Office
Crown Buildings
Artillery Rd
COLERAINE
BT52 2AJ
- Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin Industrial Estate
ENNISKILLEN
BT74 4EJ
- Dungannon Office
Crown Buildings
Thomas Street
DUNGANNON
BT70 1HR
- Sperrin House
Sedan Avenue
OMAGH
BT79 7AQ

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide a list of all the office and part-time offices which were open but not permitted to receive application forms for the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5658/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The following are the DARD public offices open on Tuesday 17 February 2009 but not receipting application forms for the Farm Modernisation Programme:

- Larne DVO
Crown Buildings
59 Pound Street
Larne
- Ballymoney Office
Crown Buildings
John Street
Ballymoney
- Lisburn Office
4 Batchelors Walk
Lisburn
- Armagh DVO
Mall West
Armagh (office doesn't open until 10.30am on Tuesday mornings)
- Newtownards DVO
Kiltonga Industrial Estate
Newtownards
- Magherafelt Office
31 Station Road
Magherafelt
- Maghera Office
12a Coleraine Road
Maghera
- Derry DVO
Crown Buildings
Asylum Road
Derry
- Ballygawley Office
2 Church Street
Ballygawley (office doesn't open until 9.30am on Tuesday mornings)
- Strabane Office
Orchard Road Industrial Estate
Strabane

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the number of applications that Countryside Services received for the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5677/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Countryside Services received no applications for the Farm Modernisation Programme

Farm Modernisation Scheme

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development the number of staff available to Countryside Services to process applications for the Farm Modernisation Scheme. (AQW 5678/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Countryside Services have not appointed any staff to process applications for the Farm Modernisation Programme.

Bee Population

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide any comparison of the bee colony losses in Germany and Slovenia in Spring 2008 to those recorded in Northern Ireland last year. (AQW 5700/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There has been no comparison between bee colony losses in Germany and Slovenia in Spring 2008 and here. The bee losses in those countries were as a result of the application of particular crop pesticides known as neonicotinoids. The treatment indirectly affected a large number of their bee colonies. No such incidents of bee losses have ever been recorded in Britain or in Ireland.

Bee Population

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what research has been carried out to identify if there is a direct link between the use of neonicotinoids and the decline of the bee population. (AQW 5701/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There has been no research into losses caused by neonicotinoids at this time, as no bee losses here have ever been attributed to their use. Average bee losses in the north of Ireland in 2008 were within the natural over-winter drop, and there is no evidence of any overall decline in the bee population here.

Bee Population

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what guidelines exist on use of pesticides in the treatment of crops and their relevant toxicity in relation to the bee population. (AQW 5703/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Pesticide Safety Directorate's Code of Practice for Using Plant Protection Products contains specific guidance on the protection of bees.

Individual plant protection products with the potential to harm bees will be labelled appropriately.

More general guidance on pesticide use can be found in the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution of Water, Air and Soil issued by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Bee Population

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how insecticide toxicity levels are measured in an agricultural environment for its potential effects on the honey bee population. (AQW 5704/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under EU law, detailed risk assessments are carried out on all pesticide active ingredients before a product can be marketed.

Part of this process assesses the risk to beneficial insects such as honeybees prior to approval, and specific conditions may be placed on products which limit how they can be used.

Bee Keepers

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of commercial apiaries and the number of amateur bee keepers located in Northern Ireland. (AQW 5725/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Whilst there are no commercial apiaries located in the north of Ireland, there are some 1,000 amateur beekeepers managing in the region of 4,000 hives here.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE**2012 Olympic Preparations**

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures he has taken and plans to take to maximise the economic and social impact of all 2012 Olympic preparations. (AQW 5556/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): A Strategy for maximising the benefits to Northern Ireland from the London 2012 Olympics has been developed, with DCAL having overarching responsibility for co-ordination. A NI 2012 Leadership Group, chaired by the DCAL Minister, has been established with senior representation from key lead organisations aligned with the 7 themes of the Strategy as follows: Sport NI, Arts Council NI, NI Tourist Board, InvestNI, Disability Sport NI, Volunteer Development Agency and Local Government. Progress is being made against three legacy outcome areas (sport, economic and social) as follows:

SPORT

The sports element of NI's 2012 Strategy is fully aligned with the objectives of the draft Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation "Sport Matters", which will be considered by the NI Executive at a future meeting. This theme is led by SportNI. An Elite Facilities Programme is underway and includes a 50m pool. Work is progressing to secure pre-games training camps in NI and 26 facilities offering 22 sports disciplines are included in the London 2012 Pre-Games Training Camps Guide. Venues range from Boxing, Judo, Hockey, Football, Swimming, Gymnastics, Archery and Fencing. 8 NI venues have also been included in the Pre-Games Training Camp Guide for the Paralympics.

ECONOMIC

An electronic brokerage system 'CompeteFor' has been created to support UK businesses in bidding for 2012 related contracts and was launched in Belfast by LOCOG and InvestNI on 8 April 2008. To date in excess of 640 companies from NI have registered and 9 companies from NI have won contracts for 2012 related work, worth approximately £60m. 96 companies have received Games related training in professional tendering in the construction industry and quality management systems through workshops held in locations across NI. 27 NI companies have visited the Olympic Park and met with ODA officials in November 2008. A consultant has been appointed to work with a pilot group of 5 companies to produce a framework document for winning tenders.

SOCIAL

The Cultural Olympiad was launched over the weekend of 26-28 September 2008 with over 20 different events taking place across NI. Northern Ireland has been awarded one of the first Inspire Marks in the UK for "The Pied Piper", a collaboration between the Ulster Orchestra's Education and Outreach Department, Associate Composer Brian Irvine, 200 schoolchildren from 4 schools in different areas of Belfast, and 60 dancers from dance schools around NI. The Inspire mark is London 2012's non-commercial brand for cultural projects and events and is awarded to outstanding, surprising, exciting, and brand new cultural projects inspired by London 2012. Northern Ireland is also committed to two of the major London 2012 signature projects, and a NI Creative Programmer has been recruited by Arts Council to support this work (funded by DCAL). Northern Ireland anticipates funding of £1.31m through the Legacy Trust UK to support a programme that aims to deliver legacy through the fusion of arts and sports. The Arts Council NI is the managing agent for delivery of Legacy Trust UK funds in NI, and last year ACNI held an open competition which identified six arts organisations that will become Project Lead Partners. DCAL is also funding the implementation of the 2012 Volunteering Strategy through a partnership with the Volunteer Development Agency and has supported the launch of the London2012 Education programme 'GetSet' in NI in September 2008.

FUTURE PLANS

Key priorities for 2009/10 include the need to encourage involvement and participation; develop NI's Cultural Olympiad plans – including involvement in the Olympic Torch Runs and Ceremonies; to secure pre-games training camps; and to further promote business opportunities – for example, a business conference is to be facilitated by the ODA in June 2009. Central co-ordination by DCAL remains essential so as to enhance communications and thereby maximise the potential legacy benefits for everyone in NI.

Gregory Campbell, MP, MLA

Elite Facilities Programme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will consider separating sports grounds safety funding from the Elite Facilities Programme. (AQW 5584/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sports grounds safety funding and funding for the Elite Facilities Programme are already separate.

Departmental Correspondence

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will make available all correspondence between his Department and (i) Bovale Developments; or (ii) the Millwood Company. (AQW 5602/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My department has had no correspondence with either of these two companies.

Installation of 3G Pitches

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what grants are available through his Department for partnership approaches for the installation of 3G pitches. (AQW 5614/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland including the distribution of funding. SNI operates two capital grant programmes, Places for Sport: Surfaces and Building Sport, which would offer funding for the construction or upgrading of pitches including 3G pitches. Both of these programmes are currently closed, however, SNI hopes to re-open for applications later this year, subject to available budgets.

Reducing Stress in the Workplace

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that stress is the primary reason for absence at work, to outline what actions his Department intends to bring forward to increase motivation and morale and reduce stress in the workplace. (AQW 5644/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Psychiatric and psychological illnesses, which include stress, anxiety and depression, are the main reasons for long-term sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

My Department recognises such illnesses whether work related or not, can lead to long term absence from work. Therefore measures have been put in place to help staff experiencing such difficulties, including welfare support and an employee assistance programme, which is available 24/7 for staff and immediate family members. Early intervention is considered essential and immediate referral to the Occupational Health Service is made when required.

Consideration is being given to undertaking an NICS wide stress survey which will help inform and influence policy direction and target 'hotspots'. However, as part of my Department's commitment to the management of absence due to stress, the Department has already started to implement the Health and Safety Executive Management Standards.

Ards and Down Sea Trout Enhancement Association Project

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on investigative work for the Ards and Down Sea Trout Enhancement Association project. (AQW 5655/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL officials have met ADSEA and Ards Borough representatives to discuss the proposed ADSEA project and outlined the specific information required to progress any policy changes to facilitate the project. Ards Borough Council now needs to prepare the cost benefit analysis and develop their outline of how the scheme might operate and complete a business case to HMT Green Book standard.

My officials will be happy to engage with the Council during this process and provide advice as required. To date there has been no further contact from the Council.

Elite Facilities Programme

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he can confirm capital funding from the Elite Facilities Programme for gymnastics in Lisburn. (AQW 5747/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: There is no existing application for funding from the Elite Facilities Programme for gymnastics in Lisburn.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

School Buses

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education for the cost of installing CCTV cameras on school buses. (AQW 5153/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Feistítear CCTV i ngach feithicil nua de chuid Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELB) mar ghnáthchleachtas.

All new Education and Library Board (ELB) vehicles have CCTV fitted as standard. The cost to retrospectively fit the remainder of the ELB school bus fleet would depend on the age and size of the individual vehicles but would cost on average in the region of £3,000 per vehicle with the total estimated to be in the region of £1.5 million.

The Department for Regional Development has advised me that the budget estimate to supply and fit a multi-camera digital CCTV system per Translink school bus is also typically £3,000. However, the cost can vary depending on the type of vehicle and specification of the CCTV system.

First Language of Pupils

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if the schools census provides information on the first language of children; and, if so, to supply the figures of the first language of pupils for the academic year 2008/9. (AQW 5333/09)

Minister of Education: Bailítear eolas ar theanga baile na bpáistí mar chuid de dhaonáireamh na scoileanna. Tá figiúirí do theangacha baile na bpáistí i scoileanna sa tábla thíos.

Information on the home language of children is collected as part of the school census exercise. Figures for home language of children in schools are contained in the table below.

NURSERY, PRIMARY, POST PRIMARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS PUPILS BY HOME LANGUAGE – 2008/09

Home language	Total
Albanian	20
Arabic	142
Bengali	118
Cantonese	659
Chinese (not specified)	129
Czech	37
Dutch	47
Egyptian	173
English	313,399
Farsi (Persian)	14

Home language	Total
Filipino/Tagalog	535
French	47
German	79
Greek	21
Gujarati	16
Hindi	172
Hungarian	96
Indian (not specified)	81
Irish	1,111
Italian	43
Japanese	9
Korean	9
Latvian	149
Lithuanian	858
Malaysian	56
Mandarin	134
Malayalam	220
Other/less than 5 cases	870
Punjabi	89
Pashto	12
Polish	2,662
Portuguese	596
Romany	11
Romanian	82
Russian	95
Slovakian	185
Somali	8
Spanish	67
Swedish	5
Tamil	21
Thai	34
Turkish	16
Urdu	126
Vietnamese	6
Zulu	5

Home language	Total
Total	323,264

Source: Annual school census.

Note:

1. Not all children who do not have English as their home language will have difficulty with the English language. The number of children who have English as an additional language and have difficulty with the English language and require support is recorded separately.
2. Work is currently being undertaken to investigate the language of those pupils specified as 'other'.

Economic Downturn

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

(AQW 5465/09)

Minister of Education: Tá sé ró-luath go fóill measúnú cruinn a dhéanamh ar an mheath eacnamaíoch agus an tionchar a bheadh aige ar bheartais agus ar chleachtais a sholáthar, cé gur dócha go mbeadh éifeacht dhíreach ag costais mhéadaithe agus ag dífhostaíocht ardaithe ar theaghlaigh a bhfuil ioncam íseal acu.

It is still too early to assess with any degree of accuracy the full impact of the economic downturn on the delivery of policies and practices, although, increasing costs and rising unemployment are likely to impact directly on families with low incomes. I have in place policies which are specifically targeted at addressing social need for example free school meals and clothing allowances. It will be important to ensure sufficient resources are made available to support those children directly affected.

The impact of the economic downturn on the Education capital programme has been evidenced through a lower than anticipated volume of disposal of surplus assets with consequence of lower receipts.

The Executive is collectively managing the response to the economic downturn with the aim of protecting local people and business from the worst effects of the economic downturn. In this context additional resources have been made available in this financial year to tackle backlog maintenance within the education sector. Those additional resources (£4 million) have provided further opportunities for the local construction industry.

The package of measures agreed by the Executive and announced on the 15 December 2008 are part of a continuing monitoring and response initiative.

It is imperative that we minimise the impact of any additional costs arising from the economic downturn on the education sector to ensure our children receive the standard of education they deserve.

Funding for Primary Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what action is being taken by her Department to reduce the gap between funding for primary schools and other sectors.

(AQW 5466/09)

Minister of Education: Tá mé go hiomlán tiomanta – laistigh de na hacmhainní atá ar fáil – do leibhéal an chistithe a sholáthraítear do bhunscoileanna a mhéadú i gcoitinne agus dona chinntiú go dtaispeánfar ar bhonn níos fearr tábhacht an luath-idirghábhála agus na bunfhoghlama trí dháiliúchán cistithe chuig bunscoileanna.

I am fully committed – within available resources – to increasing the level of funding provided to primary schools in overall terms and ensuring that the funding distributed to primary schools better reflects the importance of early intervention and primary learning.

I have made provision for an increase in funding levels distributed to primary schools in 2008/09 under the Local Management of Schools funding arrangements with a view to progressively increasing this funding in both 2009-10 and 2010-11. Significant resources are being made available to primary schools, with an additional £32 million over the next three years, to support primary schools with the delivery of the foundation stage of the revised curriculum. A further £12 million is being made available specifically to help primary school teaching principals over the budget period.

Average Age of Teachers

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education what is the average age of teachers in (i) primary; and (ii) secondary schools, broken down by Education and Board areas. (AQW 5482/09)

Minister of Education: Tá an freagra sa tábla thíos.

The answer is given in the table below.

AVERAGE AGE¹ OF TEACHERS IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND IN 2007-2008, BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AND PHASE OF EDUCATION

Education and Library Board	Sector	
	Primary ² schools	Post-primary schools
Belfast	40.9	40.4
Western	40.8	40.2
North Eastern	40.4	40.0
South Eastern	41.4	41.2
Southern	40.4	40.7
North of Ireland	40.8	40.5

1 Mean age (measured in whole years) as at 30 November 2007.

2 Includes teachers in preparatory departments of grammar schools.

School Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to (i) list; and (ii) give the value of each school project, for the current year and those planned for the next year. (AQW 5488/09)

Minister of Education: Soláthraítear i dTábla A thíos na sonraíthe ar phríomhthionscadail caipitiúla scoile a bhfuil obair á déanamh faoi láthair orthu nó a bhfuil obair curtha i gcrích orthu sa bhliain airgeadais reatha.

Table A below provides details of major school capital projects where construction work is currently underway or has been completed in the current financial year.

Table B provides details of major capital school projects where it is currently estimated construction work will start on site in the 2009/10 financial year. This is of course subject to all the necessary planning and building processes being completed satisfactorily and the availability of resources in any particular year. It will be subject to, and take into account departmental policies such as area-based planning.

TABLE A

Projects Ongoing or Completed in 2008/09	£m
Ashfield Girls HS, Belfast - New replacement school	19.5
Bangor Academy - New replacement school	26.8
Boys Model, Belfast - New replacement school	29.2
Model School for Girls, Belfast - New replacement school	25.7
Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast - New replacement school	22.8
Holy Cross College, Strabane - New replacement school	31.0
Orangefield PS, Belfast - New replacement school	5.7
St Cecilia's College - New replacement school	17.0
St Mary's College - New replacement school on new site	17.0
Pond Park P.S., Lisburn - New replacement school	3.9

Projects Ongoing or Completed in 2008/09	£m
Towerview P.S., Bangor – New replacement school	2.7
Victoria P.S., Ballyhalbert – New replacement school	1.6
Abbey G.S., Newry – New replacement school	17.2
Assumption G.S., Ballynahinch – Extension & Refurbishment	16.1
Ballinderry P.S. – New replacement school	2.7
Ballyholme P.S. Bangor – Extension & Refurbishment	3.8
Ballymacrickett P.S. Glenavy – New replacement school	3.4
Brookefield Special School, Moira – New replacement school	2.9
Burnfoot/Dungiven/Largy P.S. – New replacement school	1.1
De La Salle College, Belfast – New replacement school	15.2
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh – New replacement school	10.0
Moorfields P.S., Ballymena – New replacement school	2.4
Mount Lourdes G.S., Enniskillen – Extension & Refurbishment	4.6
St Colman's College, Newry – Extension & Refurbishment	13.2
St Dominic's H.S., Belfast – Extension & Refurbishment	18.5
St Patrick's P.S. Saul – New replacement school	1.9
St Peter's P.S. Cloughreagh – New replacement school	3.8
Waringstown P.S. – Extension & Refurbishment	1.6
St Catherine's College, Armagh – Extension	0.6
Templepatrick P.S. – New replacement school	4.2
Lisbellaw P.S. – New replacement school	2.6
Lisnagelvin P.S. – New replacement school	5.4
St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. – New replacement school	4.2
Banbridge Academy – Extension & Refurbishment	15.7
Ravenscroft Nursery School – New replacement school	0.8
Glendhu Nursery School – New replacement school	0.6

TABLE B

Projects Expected to Commence in 2009/10	Estimated £m
Glenwood P.S. / Edenderry N.S., Belfast. – New replacement school	10.7
Our Lady's & St Patrick's GS, Knock- New replacement school	24.4
Springhill P.S., Belfast – New replacement school	3.2
St Joseph's PS, Carryduff - New replacement school	5.4
St Mary's PS, Portglenone - New replacement school	3.5
St Patrick's GS, Downpatrick - New replacement school	16.3
Strand / Sydenham P.S. Belfast – New replacement school	3.2
Strandtown P.S., Belfast – New replacement school	15.1
Taughmonagh PS, Belfast - New replacement school	2.2
Bangor G.S. – New replacement school	16.1

Projects Expected to Commence in 2009/10	Estimated £m
Coranny & Cornagague P.S. – New replacement school	1.5
Dean Maguire College, Carrickmore – New replacement school	11.1
Dromore Central P.S. – New replacement school	9.9
Edendork P.S. Dungannon – New replacement school	6.3
Foyle & Londonderry College – New replacement school	22.5
Glastry College Ballyhalbert – New replacement school	8.8
Knockbreda H.S. Belfast – New replacement school	11.7
Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick – New replacement school	5.2
Little Flower Girls S.S., Belfast – New replacement school	10.7
Lurgan College - New replacement school	10.6
Magherafelt H.S – New replacement school.	11.1
Parkhall College, Antrim – New replacement school and Youth Provision	14.7
Portadown College – New replacement school	16.0
Priory College, Holywood – New replacement school	10.5
St Columbanus College, Bangor – New replacement school and Youth Provision	15.0
St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore – New replacement school	2.7
St Joseph's Convent P.S. Newry – New replacement school	4.7
St Louis G.S. Kilkeel – New replacement school	12.2
St Mary's P.S. Banbridge – New replacement school	4.8
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon – New replacement school	17.6
St Patrick's College, Banbridge – New replacement school	10.4
Strathearn G.S. Belfast – New replacement school	16.4
Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan – New replacement school	5.5
The High School Ballynahinch – New replacement school	10.5
Carrick P.S. Warrenpoint – New replacement school	3.8
Colaiste Feirste, – Extension & Refurbishment	13.0
Dromintee P.S. Killeavey – New replacement school	2.1
Magherafelt P.S. – New replacement school	4.3
Scoil Na Fuiseoige, Belfast – New replacement school	1.9
St Clare's Abbey P.S. Newry – New replacement school	9.2
St Colman's P.S. Lambeg – New replacement school	3.7
St Columba's P.S. Straw – New replacement school	1.9
St Joseph's P.S. Madden – New replacement school	1.6
St Mary's P.S., Newcastle – New replacement school	3.9
St Oliver Plunkett P.S. Forkhill – New replacement school	1.7
St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan – New replacement school	3.6
Whitehouse P.S. Newtownabbey – New replacement school	3.3

Development of Teachers

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education the cost of the three year early professional development of teachers. (AQW 5505/09)

Minister of Education: Léirítear sa tábla seo a leanas na costais inaitheanta a bhaineann leis an chlár 3 bliana um ionduchtú (bliain 1) agus Luathfhorbairt Ghairmiúil (EPD) (bliain 2 agus 3) do mhúinteoirí nua sa bhliain airgeadais 2007/2008.

The following table shows the identifiable costs of the 3 year programme of Induction (year 1) and Early Professional Development (EPD) (years 2 and 3) of beginning teachers in the 2007/2008 financial year.

2007/08	£000's
Induction	517
Early Professional Development	
(1) Education and Library Boards	314
(2) Higher Education Institutions	100
Total	931

Note: Staffing costs incurred by the 5 Education and Library Boards' Curriculum Advisory Support Service on Induction and EPD are excluded from the figures as they could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The years spent during Induction and EPD are central and essential to the continuing professional development of teachers. These two stages build upon the competences already acquired during initial teacher education and play an important part in developing both the confidence and competence of teachers starting out on their careers. Requiring EPD to be completed in only one year would put undue pressure and stress on all beginning teachers and the experienced teacher-tutors who support them, and cause special pressure and difficulties for those who are not in permanent or full-time employment.

The 3-year model of Induction and Early Professional Development here has been adopted by the Welsh Assembly.

Childhood Obesity

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the programmes and initiatives that her Department has launched to combat childhood obesity, in the last year; and to outline which ones she intends to launch in the coming year. (AQW 5507/09)

Minister of Education: Tá géarthuisceint ag mo Roinn ar an ról atá aici maidir leis an chomhrac in aghaidh mhurtall na hóige agus bíonn sí gníomhach leis an Ghrúpa Stiúrtha um Chosc an Mhurtaill, treoraithe ag DHSSPS, agus na grúpaí comhairleacha a bhaineann leis.

My department is acutely aware of the significant role it has to play in combating childhood obesity and is active in the DHSSPS led Obesity Prevention Steering Group and all its advisory groups. The education system, both formal and informal and from early years upwards, is to the forefront in encouraging healthy lifestyles and providing children and young people with the foundations on which to build for active and healthy lives in the future.

During the last year my Department has continued to implement and support its Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and Other Food in Schools initiative. In March 2009 the Health Promotion Agency, in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, will launch a number of resources to encourage good eating habits and sound nutritional standards in schools. The Department will also be developing a marketing strategy to further promote the initiative by targeting the key groups involved and will be taking this forward in the autumn. In addition, the Department expects to consult soon on its draft Food in Schools policy.

In the last year I built on the successful introduction of the Curriculum Sports Programme in primary schools through expanding the programme, working with the GAA and IFA. There are now 60 coaches in primary schools working through this programme to develop the generic physical literacy skills of our youngest children and to support primary teachers in delivering PE. The programme is beneficial in getting children to be more

active and have healthier lifestyles, and links into other areas of learning within the curriculum. I will continue to build on the positive outcomes to date from this programme.

Development of Teachers

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how much the early professional development of teachers would cost if its duration was one year, as in England and Wales. (AQW 5517/09)

Minister of Education: Léirítear sa tábla seo a leanas na costais inaitheanta a bhaineann leis an chlár 3 bliana um ionduchtú (bliain 1) agus Luathfhorbairt Ghairmiúil (EPD) (bliain 2 agus 3) do mhúinteoirí nua sa bhliain airgeadais 2007/2008.

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The 3-year model of Induction and Early Professional Development here has been adopted by the Welsh Assembly.

Rossmar Special School

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education when the planned new build facilities at Rossmar Special School will be completed. (AQW 5519/09)

Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair freagrach as pleanáil an fhoirgnimh scoile nua do Rossmore Special School.

The Western Education and Library Board has responsibility for planning of the proposed new school building for Rossmar Special School. The Board has advised that it is currently revising the economic appraisal for the project and has estimated that it will be spring 2011 before the planning process will be completed and construction work gets underway, with an estimated completion date of around autumn 2012.

Departmental Staff

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Education how many employees in her Department travel from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast for work. (AQW 5526/09)

Minister of Education: Ní oibríonn ach duine as gach céad de na daoine atá fostaithe ag an Roinn i mBéal Feirste agus ní thaistlionn duine ar bith acu ó Dhoire.

Only 1% of my Department's employees work in Belfast and none travel from Derry.

Glenravel Primary School

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Education to confirm that a mobile building for administrative purposes will be provided for Glenravel Primary School; and when the installation will be completed. (AQW 5544/09)

Minister of Education: Tá aontaithe ag an Roinn go bhfuil gá le cóiríocht bhreise shealadach ag an scoil le heasnamh oifige, seomra foirne agus saoráidí acmhainní a réiteach.

The Department has agreed that there is a need for additional temporary accommodation at the school to address a shortfall in office, staffroom and resource facilities. The scheme is currently at tender stage and it will be progressed early in the 2009/10 financial year and should be completed later that year.

Glenravel Primary School

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Education to confirm that a mobile classroom for teaching purposes will be provided for Glenravel Primary School; and to provide a timetable for the installation. (AQW 5545/09)

Minister of Education: Tá rollú de 143 dalta ag an scoil faoi láthair, agus tá 3 sheomra ranga buana agus 3 sheomra ranga sealadacha ag an scoil.

The school currently has an enrolment of 143 pupils, the accommodation comprises of 3 permanent classrooms and 3 temporary classrooms. The existing accommodation at the school should be suitable for an enrolment of up to 145 pupils. The school has not made a request for additional teaching accommodation to the Department. The Department has agreed to provide additional temporary accommodation for other purposes.

Transfer 2010

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5227/09, if the legal advice she received from the Departmental Solicitor's Office, about the guidelines she announced in the Assembly on 2 February, 2009, is subject to freedom of information requests. (AQW 5559/09)

Minister of Education: Níl aon ní ann a chuireann cosc ar iarratas saorála faisnéise leis an chomhairle dlí a fheiceáil. Dhéanfaí breithniú ar iarratas ar bith dá leithéid ag féachaint d'alt 42 den Freedom of Information Act 2000 a bhaineann le pribhléid ghairmiúil dlí.

There is nothing to preclude a freedom of information request for sight of this legal advice. Any such request would be considered with reference to section 42 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which relates to legal professional privilege.

Irish Language

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education how many pupils' first language is Irish. (AQW 5560/09)

Minister of Education: Tá 1,111 dalta ar scoileanna sa bhliain 2008/09 a raibh sé liostaithe go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar theanga baile acu.

There are 1,111 pupils at schools in 2008/09 who have listed their home language as Irish.

Note: Figures relate to pupils in primary, post primary and special schools.

Source: Annual school census.

Provision of Multi Sports Facilities

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister of Education for an update (i) on the transfer of the site at Beechmount Leisure Centre to Colaiste Feirste; and (ii) on the Provision of Multi Sports Facilities: School and Community business plan. (AQW 5563/09)

Minister of Education: Tá mo Roinn i mbun oibre le Coláiste Feirste agus le hoifigigh ó Chomhairle Cathrach Bhéal Feirste faoi láthair maidir le haistriú láithreán Shólann Ard na bhFeá chuig an scoil le háiseanna spóirt a sholáthar don scoil.

My Department is currently liaising with Coláiste Feirste and Belfast City Council officers on the transfer of the Beechmount Leisure Centre site to the school to allow for the provision of sports facilities at the school. An appraisal is being finalised on the project which will also take account of the school's intention to make its sports facilities available for use by the community.

Teachers from Protestant Backgrounds

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if she supports the principle of equality of opportunity for teachers from Protestant backgrounds; and if so, if she will be asking the OFMDFM to consider changing article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. (AQW 5595/09)

Minister of Education: Tugaim lántacaíocht do phrionsabal chomhionannas deiseanna do gach duine sa tsochaí. Áirítear air seo páistí agus daoine óga, múinteoirí agus fostaithe eile san earnáil oideachais.

I fully support the principle of equality of opportunity for all members of our society. This includes children and young people, teachers and other workers in the education sector.

To ensure there is equality in the Teaching sector I have decided to conduct a review of current and future recruitment opportunities in that sector. The review will be conducted by my officials working closely with, and involving, key stakeholders. The review will be completed by January 2010.

Once the review is completed, the need for additional action (and the type of action) will be fully assessed.

Entrance Examinations

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5204/09, to clarify her understanding of 'social justice, equality and excellence'. (AQW 5596/09)

Minister of Education: I gcás Aistrithe 2010, tá leagtha amach agam sa treoir aidhmeanna agus cuspóirí atá le cur i bhfeidhm maidir leis an phróiseas aistrithe chuig iarbhunscoileanna:

For Transfer 2010 I have set out in guidance aims and objectives to be applied to the process of transfer to post-primary school:

- that admissions decisions are fair and give each child the opportunity to reach his/her full potential;
- that the overall arrangements for transfer, and within that the respective roles of the Department, the ELBs/ESA, primary schools and post-primary schools' Boards of Governors are clear and understood;
- that post-primary schools' Boards of Governors achieve robust and accurate admissions decisions.

The guidance reflects my policy not to include academic admissions criteria in the menu of admissions criteria. That is because I do not consider academic selection to be consistent with the objective of treating children fairly and giving each child the opportunity to fulfil her or his potential.

In addition to this overarching framework I would draw attention to my recommendation that all post-primary schools list as their first criterion for admission a commitment to admit children who are entitled to free school meals in numbers which reflect the proportion of first preference applications received from such children. The guidance also recommends that geographical criteria ("parish" and "catchment area") are used in conjunction with "nearest suitable school" as a means of ensuring that rural and outlying applicants are not disadvantaged by their address.

Taken as a whole, and if followed by all post-primary schools, the guidance offers an opportunity for socially just, equitable decisions to be made which will allow all children the opportunity to pursue excellence, whether that be via an academic or vocational education pathway or a combination of both.

Departmental Staff

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education to detail the location and number of staff in each of her Departmental offices, broken down by constituency. (AQW 5597/09)

Minister of Education: Tá foireann 477 duine lonnaithe i dTeach Ráth Giall, Beannchar, atá mar chuid de thoghcheantar Dhún Thuaidh agus tá foireann 120 duine lonnaithe i dTeach Thaobh an Uisce, Doire atá i dtoghcheantar an Fheabhail.

There are 477 staff in Rathgael House, Bangor, which is located in the North Down constituency and 120 staff in Waterside House, Derry, which is in the Foyle constituency.

Dromore High School

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Education what consideration she is giving to making Dromore High School an education provider for 11-18 year olds. (AQW 5687/09)

Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt ag déanamh breithnithe faoi láthair ar mholadh nua um séú bliain a bhunú in Dromore High School.

The Southern Education and Library Board are currently consulting on a new proposal to establish a sixth form at Dromore High School. I understand that the Board plan to publish a proposal in April. Publication of a proposal would initiate a statutory two month period when comments and objections can be submitted to my Department.

Increasing Usage of E-mail

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what action she is taking to reduce the amount of paper documentation and to increase the usage of e-mail. (AQW 5696/09)

Minister of Education: Tá córais fhadbhunaithe r-phoist ag mo Roinn agus nuair is féidir, bíonn baill foirne ag comhfhreagairt agus ag roinnt eolais ar bhonn leictreonach, go hinmheánach agus go seachtrach, le heagraíochtaí mar scoileanna, an earnáil oideachais i gcoiteann, laistigh den Roinn agus le Ranna eile an NICS chomh maith le daoine den phobal amuigh.

My Department has long established e-mail systems and where possible, staff correspond and share information electronically, both internally and externally, to organisations such as schools, the wider education sector, within DE, with other NICS Departments and members of the public.

In 2008 the Department introduced a records management system which allows staff to store and view electronic documents. Although a requirement to print material for meetings remains, staff are encouraged to print only when necessary.

In addition, Departmental publications are available on the website and the general public can contact DE via the Departmental electronic mail box.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many complaints she has received from parents, through Board of Governors, in relation to post-primary transfer arrangements, in the Ards Borough Council, in the last twelve months. (AQW 5709/09)

Minister of Education: Le dhá mhí dhéag anuas, ní bhfuair mé aon litreacha gearáin (trí Bhoird Gobarnóirí na Scoileanna) faoi shocruithe an aistrithe iarbhunscoile ó thuismitheoirí a bhfuil a bpáistí ag freastal ar scoileanna laistigh de limistéar Chomhairle Buirge na hArda.

I have received no letters of complaint (through school Boards of Governors) about post-primary transfer arrangements within the last twelve months from parents whose children attend schools within the Ards Borough Council area.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education how many complaints she has received from parents, through Board of Governors, in relation to post-primary transfer arrangements, in the Strangford constituency, in the last twelve months. (AQW 5710/09)

Minister of Education: Le dhá mhí dhéag anuas, ní bhfuair mé aon litreacha gearáin (trí Bhoird Gobarnóirí na Scoileanna) faoi shocruithe an aistrithe iarbhunscoile ó thuismitheoirí a bhfuil a bpáistí ag freastal ar scoileanna laistigh de limistéar Thoghcheantar Loch Cuan.

I have received no letters of complaint (through school Boards of Governors) about post-primary transfer arrangements within the last twelve months from parents whose children attend schools within the Strangford constituency.

Primary Schools

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many primary school children in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area are in composite classes, and what variation there has been in this figure, over the last five years. (AQW 5734/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table follows.

YEAR 1 – 7 CHILDREN IN COMPOSITE CLASSES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA 2004/05 – 2008/09

Year	Pupils in composite classes
2004/05	4,230
2005/06	4,284
2006/07	5,079
2007/08	4,532
2008/09	4,259

Source: school census in the north of Ireland.

Note:

1. Figures relate to pupils in composite classes with other Year 1 – 7 pupils.

Special Schools

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister of Education what action has been taken to strengthen the mechanism of the transition planning process in special schools to ensure that pupils are facilitated and supported until they leave school. (AQW 5752/09)

Minister of Education: Bunaíodh Grúpa Idir-rannach (IDG) sa bhliain 2002 ina raibh an Roinn Oideachais, an Roinn Fostaíochta agus Foghlama, an Roinn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábhailteachta Poiblí páirteach le breithniú a dhéanamh ar an dóigh le feabhsuithe straitéiseacha sa phróiseas Aistrithe a dhéanamh do dhaoine óga a bhfuil Ráitis um Riachtanais Speisialta Oideachais acu.

In 2002 an Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) involving the Departments of Education, Employment and Learning and Health, Social Services and Public Safety was established to consider how to make strategic improvements in the Transition process for young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

The Report and Action Plan of the Transitions IDG was published in 2006. It contained an action plan, which provides over 20 actions to address issues that were presented to the IDG. Recent monitoring indicates that all but one of the actions have now been met in full.

DE has provided the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) with a total of £1.86m to improve the transitions planning process through the appointment of education transitions co-ordinators and for appropriate life skills

training for independent living. A further £100k per annum was secured from the Children and Young People's Funding Package in 2006/07 and 2007/08 to further enhance life skills training. With this funding ELBs have enabled over 370 pupils to participate in Life Skills Training Programmes to improve self-help and independent living skills.

In addition DE is heading a sub - group of the Ministerial Sub - committee on Children and Young People. Membership of the sub-group includes a number of departments and the Juvenile Justice Centre and the focus is

“Provision for children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools, including transitions to adulthood and the provision of appropriate health and social care interventions.”

The sub-group is currently developing an action plan, to be implemented by all participating Departments, which will contain actions to further strengthen policy delivery and post school provision.

Foreign Language' Courses

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education if she plans to introduce 'teaching English as a foreign language' courses for teachers to assist them in teaching children from non-English speaking households.

(AQW 5757/09)

Minister of Education: Bíonn sé mar aidhm ag cúrsaí 'Múineadh an Bhéarla mar theanga iasachta' (TEFL) oiliúint a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí atá ag múineadh Béarla i dtír nach bhfuil Béarla mar phríomhtheanga aici, nó atá ag múineadh Béarla i scoileanna teanga a chuireann cúrsaí ar fáil do dhaoine fásta agus do pháistí.

The 'teaching of English as a foreign language' (TEFL) courses are designed to train teachers who are teaching English either in a country where English is not the first language, or in language schools offering courses to adults and children.

As TEFL is comparable with foreign languages' curricula in schools it is inappropriate to the education of newcomer pupils. Some teachers who have taken TEFL courses have found that they do not meet their professional development needs as they have not helped them make the curriculum accessible to newcomer pupils.

Teachers need training and support on language development and acquisition in the context of the school curriculum here, as their role is to help newcomer pupils access the curriculum. The Inclusion and Diversity Service is engaged in this task through programmes of regional in-service training provision and support services, which are based on the 'Toolkit for Diversity in the Primary School'.

Other support services, which the IDS offers to schools, are diversity coordinators, interpreting and translating services and a multi-lingual website for teachers and newcomer parents.

In addition, the Service will focus on such areas as a new toolkit for post-primary schools, intercultural awareness, the development and production of dual language texts, home/school/community links and the development of the European language portfolio for primary and post-primary schools etc.

Cultural Issues

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to provide a list of Departmental consultees on cultural issues.

(AQW 5775/09)

Minister of Education: Coinníonn mo Roinn liosta comhairlí a mbaintear úsáid astu i ndáil leis an scéim chomhionannais. Níl liosta ar leith maidir le ceisteanna cultúrtha.

My Department maintains a list of consultees for use in connection with its equality scheme. There is not a specific list in relation to cultural issues.

The nature of the policy under review, and its relevance to any particular body, or interest group, determines which organisations are consulted on any given policy.

Equality Issues

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to provide a list of Departmental consultees on equality issues.

(AQW 5776/09)

Minister of Education: Tá 652 comhairlí ar liosta comhairliúcháin chomhionannais faoi láthair.

The full equality consultation list currently consists of 652 consultees.

The nature of the policy under review, and its relevance to any particular body or interest group determines which organisations are actually consulted on any given policy.

I have arranged for a copy of the current equality consultation list to be placed in the Assembly library.

Strangford College

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Education whether Strangford College's need for additional classrooms will be addressed as a priority. (AQW 5788/09)

Minister of Education: D'aontaigh an Roinn go bhfuil gá ann le cóiríocht shealadach bhreise bheith ag an scoil ionas go ndíreofar isteach ar easnamh áiseanna don séú bliain. Cuirfear tús leis an scéim go luath sa bhliain airgeadais 2009/10.

The Department has agreed that there is a need for additional temporary accommodation at the school to address a shortfall in sixth form facilities. The scheme will be progressed early in the 2009/10 financial year.

CCEA Test Paper

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4824/09, if she would publish the correspondence she received from the (i) Governing Bodies Association; (ii) the Catholic Heads Association; and (iii) the Commission for Catholic Education, in connection with using a CCEA paper. (AQW 5826/09)

Minister of Education: Is ceist a bhaineann leis na heagraíochtaí aonair í cé acu a shocraíonn siad a gcomhfhreagras a scaipeadh ar bhonn níos forleithne. Níl rún agam an comhfhreagras a fhoilsiú.

It is a matter for these individual organisations to decide whether they wish to share their correspondence with me more widely. I do not intend publishing the correspondence.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5234/09, in which part of her answers to AQW 2259/09 and AQW 2260/09 did she indicate whether her new guidance for schools obliges schools operating the Dickson Plan to refrain from using academic criteria for transfer. (AQW 5827/09)

Minister of Education: Mínítear sa chéad alt den fhreagra a thug mé do na ceisteanna a cuireadh ní ba luaithe go bhfuil an seasamh céanna i gceist maidir le scoileanna laistigh de limistéar an Dickson Plan agus atá i gceist le gach scoil eile.

The first paragraph of my combined answer to those earlier questions explains that the position pertaining to schools within the Dickson Plan area is the same as that for all other schools.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5235/09, if the factual description of the legal context in which post-primary admissions will operate for Transfer 2010 includes a ban on the use of academic criteria. (AQW 5828/09)

Minister of Education: The Transfer 2010 guidance is clear on this point.

Paragraph 10 of the guidance states: "prior to 2010, the admissions criteria that a post-primary schools' Board of Governors could consider using for their school were governed by Article 16 of the Education Order (NI) 1997 and admissions criteria regulations drawn up by the Department under the same Article; but due to the replacement of this Article, its supporting regulations will lapse for the admissions process from 2010 onwards."

Sonraítear i bParagraf 11: “laistigh de na dualgais agus na freagrachtaí reachtúla leanúnacha...beidh sé dleathach do Bhord Gobharnóirí iarbhunscóile aon chritéar iontrála a úsáid seachas na critéir sin a bhfuil cosc orthu níos ginearálta trí reachtaíocht comhionannais.”

Paragraph 11 states: “within their continuing statutory duties and responsibilities...it will be legal for a post-primary school’s Board of Governors to use any admissions criteria except those prohibited more generally by equality legislation.”

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5562/09, in relation to her guidelines of 24 February, if a school is legally permitted to proceed with plans to utilise academic criteria for post-primary transfer from 2010 onwards. (AQW 5829/09)

Minister of Education: Tugann an treoir a foilsíodh i ndiaidh mo ráitis chuig an Tionól ar 2 Feabhra 2009 cur síos fíriciúil ar an chomhthéacs dleathach ina n-oibreoidh iontrálacha iarbhunscóile d’Aistriú 2010. Éilítear ar scoileanna “aire a thabhairt” ar an treoir.

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. Schools are required to “have regard to” the guidance.

For schools to “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. The Department strongly recommends that any post-primary school Board of Governors that is considering using academic admissions criteria and, therefore, an independent assessment mechanism or “Entrance Test”, as a basis for admissions in 2010, should be very mindful of the need for a robust assessment mechanism capable of providing for sound ability-based admissions decisions.

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.

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.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5562/09, if any part of her guidance can be used to prevent a school from using academic criteria for post-primary transfer from 2010. (AQW 5839/09)

Minister of Education: Tugann an treoir a foilsíodh i ndiaidh mo ráitis chuig an Tionól ar 2 Feabhra 2009 cur síos fíriciúil ar an chomhthéacs dleathach ina n-oibreoidh iontrálacha iarbhunscóile d’Aistriú 2010. Éilítear ar scoileanna “aire a thabhairt” ar an treoir.

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Post Primary Transfer

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 5561/09, given her public position that any school which proceeds with plans to utilise academic criteria, and ignores her transfer guidance, helps to ‘perpetuate the inequalities associated with the outgoing arrangements and risks creating dysfunction within the overall admissions process’, what powers are available to her to prevent schools from introducing academic selection. (AQW 5859/09)

Minister of Education: Tugann an treoir a foilsíodh i ndiaidh mo ráitis chuig an Tionól ar 2 Feabhra 2009 cur síos fíriciúil ar an chomhthéacs dleathach ina n-oibreoidh iontrálacha iarbhunskoile d’Aistriú 2010. Éilítear ar scoileanna “aire a thabhairt” ar an treoir.

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DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Job Vacancies

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many job vacancies are available to people seeking employment and how many of these vacancies are (i) full; or (ii) part time. (AQW 5320/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Employment Service operates a job vacancy service which holds information on vacancies notified to the Department. These vacancies do not represent the total number of vacancies available to jobseekers in Northern Ireland.

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 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.

Of the 3,190 jobs available, 2,096 were full-time jobs and 1,094 were part-time jobs.

Maritime Coastal Agency

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Maritime Coastal Agency’s compliance with the Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2004. (AQW 5325/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I assume the member is referring to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and to the Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004.

The regulations establish in statute a three step procedure for handling a range of formal grievances and disciplinary/dismissal situations in the workplace. Failure to adhere to the steps can have implications for subsequent proceedings before an industrial tribunal or the Fair Employment Tribunal.

If employers do not adhere to the statutory requirements in situations where the regulations specify that they should, it is open to employees to bring a complaint to an industrial tribunal or the Fair Employment Tribunal. Tribunals have the power to take account of an employer's failure to follow the statutory procedures. In some cases, this can mean an increase in any award made to the employee. In the most serious cases, the tribunal can reach an automatic finding that the employee has been unfairly dismissed.

I trust that the member will bring to the attention of anyone who may have a complaint about a particular employer that there is a legal mechanism whereby their complaint can be heard and dealt with.

Departmental Staff with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number and percentage of employees in his Department who have disabilities. (AQW 5372/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: 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.

Maritime Coastal Agency

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what employment rights do workers with the Maritime Coastal Agency have. (AQW 5409/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I assume the member is referring to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The employment rights of workers with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency do not differ from the rights of workers employed elsewhere in Northern Ireland, although it is possible that differing contractual arrangements above and beyond the statutory requirements may apply.

Comprehensive information on a range of employment rights is available on my Department's website at www.delni.gov.uk/erpublications.

The member may also be aware that the Labour Relations Agency operates a helpline service which is available to employers, employees, trade unions and others and provides clear, confidential, independent and impartial advice to assist the caller in resolving issues in the workplace. While the helpline advisors cannot provide a legal opinion they can help callers gain a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities as well as identifying possible options to help resolve their issues.

Stranmillis College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many individuals conducted the interviews for the current Board of Governors at Stranmillis College. (AQW 5419/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In accordance with The Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland's (OCPA NI) Code of Practice, interviews for those members of the current Board of Governors at Stranmillis University College nominated by my Department were conducted by three individuals. These were, the Chair of the Governing Body, a Senior Officer from my Department's Higher Education Division and an independent OCPA NI assessor.

The current Chairman of the Governing Body, Mr Stephen Costello, self-nominated for the publicly advertised post. His written application was considered by a panel consisting of the Senior Officer from Higher Education Division, the then Acting Chair of the Stranmillis Governing Body and the independent OCPA NI assessor. The

panel fully supported the nomination. In line with OCPA NI guidance, Mr Costello was informally interviewed by the Senior Officer from Higher Education Division before a recommendation was made to the Direct Rule Minister, Barry Gardiner MP, that he be appointed Chairman of the Governing Body.

In accordance with the Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and the College's Instrument of Government, the Academic Staff Representative and the Support Staff Representative on the Governing Body are elected from within the College. The Principal of the College and the President of the Students' Union are members of the Governing Body by virtue of their office.

Apprenticeships

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action he is taking to ensure that job and apprenticeship opportunities are not subject to further reductions. (AQW 5431/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department is focused on ensuring that training, aimed at providing the skills required to compete for employment, is there for anyone who wishes to avail of it. Programmes like Steps to Work, Pathways and the new all-age apprenticeship provision, ApprenticeshipsNI, have been introduced to equip people with the necessary skills for employment.

In addition to these measures, we will continue to work closely with local bodies across Northern Ireland such as District Councils, Chambers of Commerce and employers in an effort to bring jobs to the local community. Through taking a multi-agency approach to tackling this problem we can work together to enhance the short and long-term prospects of those people affected.

My Department works in partnership with employers to assist them to fill vacancies and to encourage them to train and upskill the existing workforce. It also continually assesses the services and 'back to work' provision available for unemployed clients to help them move towards and into employment.

Allied to my these actions to ensure continued job and apprentice opportunities, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest NI continue to work closely with Northern Ireland's manufacturing and tradable services companies to improve their productivity, helping them to become more internationally competitive and successful. This intervention is even more important now as we continue to move through a downturn in the economic cycle. Invest NI has initiated a number of remedial actions to help clients to trade through these challenges avoiding further reductions. In particular, these actions focus on the areas of cash flow management, cost reduction, product development, exports and improving production efficiency.

Ultimately, the long term goal of assisting Northern Ireland's companies to improve their productivity through moving up the value chain and achieving international success should result in an increase in the number of value added employment opportunities, including apprenticeships, available to the whole community.

Apprenticeships

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprenticeships are available, and where these are located, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 5434/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: In 2007, the Department issued contracts to a number of different Training Suppliers in Northern Ireland, to ensure the provision of occupational training for any employer who wished to take on an apprentice. These contracts were issued to a Training Supplier(s) in each of 26 different contract management areas (approximately equivalent to district council areas). This approach ensures that training in all occupational areas is available throughout Northern Ireland.

ApprenticeshipsNI, the Department's Apprenticeship provision, is an employer-led programme. This means that the Department does not specify, or put a limit on, an amount of apprenticeships that are available in Northern Ireland. Instead, if an employer wishes to employ an apprentice within a particular occupational area, then the employer need only approach the Training Supplier who has been contracted to deliver training for that occupational sector, within the management area where the employer is based. Where this is the case, the Department will fund the apprenticeship.

The Department currently has a total of 10,271 apprentices on training provision. Whilst this information cannot, unfortunately, be broken down by parliamentary constituency, we can break it down into the following geographical categories, where the apprentices have their home addresses:

Belfast	County Antrim	County Armagh	County Down	County Fermanagh	County Londonderry	County Tyrone	Republic of Ireland
1,987	2,412	1,281	1,517	528	1,229	1,272	45

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (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 5464/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Executive is committed to doing all it can to protect local people and business from the worst effects of the economic downturn. Its importance is demonstrated by the fact that the economic downturn is a standing item of Executive business.

The downturn has resulted in a sharp increase in the levels of unemployment which in turn has led to more people wanting to avail of the services which my Department offers to those searching for new employment opportunities. In response, work has been reprioritised to provide additional support to these frontline services, operational capacity has been increased. In addition, 23 new Careers Advisers recruited in line with the new Strategy for Careers Education, Information and Guidance, have also been bolstering the services available. Processes have been reviewed and improved to facilitate a rapid response and, where necessary, measures such as overtime and Saturday opening have been used. The impact of continuing changes to the unemployment pattern are being constantly monitored to make sure needs are being met.

In addition, the Department has noted that the number of apprenticeships being recruited is falling in sectors relating to the construction trades and that some have been made redundant. The Department has responded by introducing contingency arrangements to allow apprentices who were made redundant from the construction, engineering and motor vehicle sectors to continue with their training. These sectors have been the most severely affected by the downturn, but my Department is monitoring the situation in other sectors and will, if necessary introduce similar arrangements.

My Department is also seeking to support employers as they try to maintain their competitive edge at this time. This support includes funding training for up to 500 employers in business improvement techniques and other seminars, and masterclasses to help them maintain high performance. Listening to employers is important at this time as we seek to ensure the skills available match with employers' current needs.

The Further Education sector is helping in this process in upskilling and retraining redundant workers. Further Education Colleges also offer employers, especially small and medium sized enterprises, support with innovation, product design and manufacture. Workforce skills training is also available to help minimise inefficiencies and enhance competitiveness. Work continues on a range of projects funded from £83 million capital investment in colleges.

Higher education is also contributing through research and innovation. Additional funding of £2.7 million has been provided to support two further projects under the "Strengthening the all-island Research Base" programme. The projects are focused on sustainability of transport and cancer medicinal chemistry.

The Northern Ireland European Social Fund expenditure and performance targets are also being reviewed to take account of the impact of the downturn on planned expenditure and to consider any amendments which might enable the Programmes better to respond to the economic situation.

Capital Investment Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list all college capital investment projects (i) for this year and (ii) planned for next year, and the value of the each investment. (AQW 5503/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Further Education sector is in the process of delivering a number of capital projects and these are in various stages of delivery. The design and delivery of such projects is normally spread across a number of years. All of the further education projects being delivered in 2008/9 and

2009/10 are across both years and some are spread across three years. The table sets out the projects and the respective capital values.

Project Title	Location	Contract Value (£m)
South Eastern Regional College – East Down – PPP	Downpatrick Newcastle Ballynahinch	24
South West College – Fermanagh	Enniskillen	8
South Eastern Regional College –PPP	Lisburn	20
North West Regional College – Strand Road	L/Derry	14
Northern Regional College	Newtownabbey	8
South Eastern Regional College	Newtownards	5
South Eastern Regional College	Bangor	13
Belfast Metropolitan College - City Centre - PPP	Belfast	44
Belfast Metropolitan College - Springvale E3	Belfast	14

Royal National Institute for the Blind

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many meetings he has had with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, and the outcomes. (AQW 5605/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: To date, I have had no meetings with the Royal National Institute for the Blind in my capacity as Minister for Employment and Learning. However, I attended the launch of the RNIB's Employability and Skills Project in June 2008.

My Department has worked closely with the RNIB, which delivers a range of programmes on its behalf. Departmental officials are participating in RNIB's new "Vision Strategy Implementation (Northern Ireland) Group".

People with Disabilities in Further Education

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what ways he is examining to bring people with a disability into further education to improve their opportunities in gaining employment. (AQW 5606/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The right to education for people with a disability is protected by the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 and my Department has put in place a number of measures to help Colleges meet their responsibilities under the legislation. These include providing assistance with the cost of technical and personal support for learners with disabilities; additional funding for tailored courses for students who cannot attend mainstream classes; and capital funding to improve physical access to college premises for people with disabilities.

My Department is currently reviewing provision for students with disabilities, especially for those with learning difficulties who are unable to access mainstream courses. All Colleges are required to take account of the needs of students with disabilities and good practice in this area is promoted throughout the Further Education sector.

Further Education provision is generally accessible to people with a disability and in 2006/07, the last year for which figures are available, there were 16,856 enrolments of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These enrolments span the full range of Further Education provision, including skills courses to prepare students for employment.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT**Pod Cast Initiative**

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why there is a delay by her Department, in clearing the script for the pod cast initiative on which the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, the NITB and the Local Belfast Partnership Boards, worked; and what is the time-scale for its clearance. (AQW 5034/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): It is important that the scripts to be used for any podcasts relating to the history of Belfast provide an accurate, balanced and informative commentary of events and characters. I believe that this has not been achieved with a number of the scripts produced for the podcasts.

I propose to give the issue my fullest consideration and ensure that these objectives have been achieved before agreeing the final version. I aim to reach a conclusion on how to proceed before the end of March.

European Commission State Aid Application

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if Coleraine was mentioned as a possible site for the telehouse in the application for European Commission state aid approval. (AQW 5360/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The European Commission State Aid application seeks approval for a project to bring a direct international communications link into the North West of Ireland. The application does not specifically mention a telehouse.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of her current policies and practices; and (ii) what changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to her Department's responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn. (AQW 5406/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Current global economic conditions clearly present us with significant challenges. In particular, the economic slowdown is having an impact on the demand for goods and services, both in Northern Ireland and further afield. Key markets, such as Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States are feeling the effects of the slowdown, and this will reduce the demand for our exports.

Invest NI is also seeing evidence of a reduction in business development activity across all sectors in terms of its current levels of work-in-progress. This suggests a mood of caution, with clients deciding to defer, or slow down, investment plans. This extends beyond our indigenous business base with the early-stage pipeline of new Foreign Direct Investment prospects also significantly reduced in comparison to the same point last year.

I am very aware of the immediate challenges local businesses are facing, and my Department, through Invest NI, has taken a number of steps to provide urgently needed assistance. A £5m Accelerated Support Fund has been established to offer targeted support during the current economic difficulties. Invest NI has also conducted a series of seminars for both client and non-client companies. These are designed to provide the local business community with specific advice and guidance on dealing with the current economic climate and its impact.

Furthermore, in my capacity as Chair of the Economic Development Forum, I established a sub-group of the Forum to consider what additional measures the Executive could be take to help businesses at this time. The sub-group reported to me on 12 February 2009, and put forward a number of proposals which are currently under consideration.

My view is that alongside helping businesses cope with the short term problems, we need to keep focused on addressing the longer term needs of the economy, as outlined in the Programme for Government – in particular, improving the value added nature of the private sector and strengthening its productivity performance. We need to continue to strengthen our competitive position, so that Northern Ireland is well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that arise when the global economy begins to strengthen.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she can ensure that the research carried out by KPMG will look at the impact of the removal of the 'Start a Small Business Programme' grant in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas; and that the review will consider how the re-introduction of a higher level of grant would help their targets in these Neighbourhood Renewal Areas. (AQW 5441/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The decision to remove the £400 grant from the Start a Business Programme (SABp) was taken as a result of recommendations emerging from an independent evaluation which highlighted serious concerns around its additionality and value for money.

An independent review has just been carried out by KPMG and Oxford Economics in an attempt to determine the specific grant impact on the level of business start-ups both at overall programme level and then broken down to factors such as by individual council and TSN areas.

Whilst there has been a decrease in Targeting Social Need (TSN) activities within SABp over recent months, this is largely in line with overall participation levels

I am currently considering the full findings of the report.

Wind Farms

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of electricity produced by wind farms in each of the last five years. (AQW 5500/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The amount of electricity produced (in Gigawatt hours - GWh) by Northern Ireland wind farms in each of the last 5 years is as follows.

Years	GWh
2004-2005	241
2005-2006	266
2006-2007	335
2007-2008	428
2008-2009 (to end January)	467

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many Civil Service employees there are in her Department in Derry/Londonderry (AQW 5528/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment has 2 Trading Standards Service employees based in Londonderry.

Departmental Staff

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many employees in her Department travel from Derry/Londonderry to Belfast for work. (AQW 5529/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: No employees of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment travel from Londonderry to Belfast for work.

Project Kelvin

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if the technical solution proposed by Hibernia Atlantic for Project Kelvin will guarantee 99.999% availability between the three mandatory locations (Derry/Londonderry, Letterkenny and Monaghan) and New York; and how this will be achieved. (AQW 5581/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The technical solution proposed by Hibernia guarantees 99.999% availability between all the mandatory locations (including Londonderry, Letterkenny and Monaghan) and New York.

The performance of the network will be monitored until the contract ends in 2018. There are penalties in the contract if Hibernia fail to meet this or any of the other performance targets in the contract.

Project Kelvin

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what terrestrial connection is proposed by Hibernia Atlantic for Project Kelvin between the submarine landing point and the telehouse facility in Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 5582/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The terrestrial connections between the cable landing point and the telehouse will be by fibre optic cable.

Project Kelvin

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what dark fibre services will be available through the technical solution proposed by Hibernia Atlantic for Project Kelvin between the Telehouse in Derry/Londonderry and the Letterkenny and Monaghan mandatory locations. (AQW 5583/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: It will be possible for companies to buy a dark fibre link from the mandatory locations in Letterkenny and Monaghan to the telehouse. It is not a condition of the contract that dark fibre must be made available at any other locations.

Reducing Stress in the Workplace

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment given that stress is the primary reason for absence at work, to outline what actions her Department intends to bring forward to increase motivation and morale and reduce stress in the workplace. (AQW 5645/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has adopted and will continue to adopt a range of actions available to all departments to combat stress in the workplace. The Department recognises that psychiatric and psychological illnesses, which include stress, anxiety and depression are the main reasons for long term sickness absence in the NICS.

Measures are in place to help staff who experience such difficulties including the promotion of work life balance, healthy lifestyle programmes and a Workplace Health Improvement Programme. In addition, staff can avail of the support of the Occupational Health Service, welfare support and an employee assistance programme. The latter is available by telephone 24/7 for staff and immediate family members.

The Department recognises that early intervention in stress cases is essential and immediate referral to the Occupational Health Service is and will continue to be made when required.

The Department will be participating fully in a future NICS-wide stress survey. The survey will contain substantial sections on both stress within the workplace and non work related stress. Actions from the survey will be aimed at identifying underlying trends for stress in the Department and any hotspots for specific targeting of preventative measures and assistance, for example in terms of job design and flexible working arrangements.

The Department recently circulated a factsheet on mental health issues to all staff and will be following this with a revised "Mental Wellbeing" policy which is currently under review in DFP. The aim is to create a much greater awareness about mental health at work and provide all DETI staff with detailed guidance on tackling stress.

Increasing Usage of E-mail

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to reduce the amount of paper documentation and to increase the usage of e-mail. (AQW 5695/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: DETI has implemented a range of policies and systems to reduce the amount of paper documentation used both internally and in communication with others. Use is made of electronic storage for the Department's records utilising the NICS-wide RECORDS NI system. This system is available to all staff in the Department who are required to use it instead of paper-based filing. Some original copies of documents, which are required for auditing or legal purposes are still requested and are held in paper format. The Department also utilises the NICS-wide financial accounting system, ACCOUNT NI, which has introduced electronic payments and transaction processing in lieu of a paper based system. Similarly the introduction of the new personnel system, HRCONNECT, has provided the medium to hold and promulgate HR policies and to transact HR matters electronically, including storage of personal records.

Communications to staff are predominately made through the Department's internal intranet and communication externally is via the Department's Internet website. In addition, extensive use is made of e-mail both internally and externally. All staff use e-mail and are encouraged to attach electronic versions of documents and letters rather than sending hard copies. All e-mails generated by DETI staff contain the phrase 'Please consider the environment - do you really need to print this e-mail?' The Department also adheres to the OFMDFM guidance on distribution of departmental publications and consultation documents that requires some recipients, including political representatives, parliamentary contacts and Legal Deposit and other libraries, to be provided with hard copy format, but encourages other recipients to be directed to an electronic format. The Department has, where it is value for money, also introduced electronic processes for transacting business with its customers, for example by Companies Registry and the Insolvency Service, and for a range of statistical surveys with businesses.

ERINI Report

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Finance Minister's statement 'That report has no standing whatsoever with the Executive' as recorded in Hansard, Volume 38, no 2 dated Tuesday 17th February 2009, in reference to the ERINI report published February 2009. (AQW 5698/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I fully concur with the remarks made by the Finance Minister on this issue.

As I have recently commented in my Department's Quarterly Economic Review, the large public sector in Northern Ireland has historically tended to help insulate the economy from the worst effects of recession. This is a key factor which should help to ensure that Northern Ireland is no worse affected by the downturn than other UK regions.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Planning Applications for Quarries

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for quarries have been refused in the last ten years. (AQW 5311/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The number of applications refused and received, for each of the years for which my Department has reliable information, is set out in the table below.

Business Year	Numbers			
	Received ¹	Decided ²	Approved	Refused
2002/03	55	49	44	5
2003/04	57	39	30	9

Business Year	Numbers			
	Received ¹	Decided ²	Approved	Refused
2004/05	43	31	28	3
2005/06	47	38	37	1
2006/07	41	24	23	1
2007/08	44	30	29	1
2008/09*	36	15	12	3

* latest figures available up to 30 September 2008

1 All applications received in the year may not have had a decision issued within the same time period and applications decided in the year may not have been received in the same time period. Therefore direct comparisons between the figures can not be made. Applications received also include withdrawn applications.

2 Applications decided do not include withdrawn applications

Source: 02/03 to 08/09 Q2 Planning Service frozen databases.

Statistical information for the period up to end December 2008 will be available in March 2009.

Planning Applications for Quarries

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for quarries have been received in the last ten years. (AQW 5312/09)

Minister of the Environment: The number of applications refused and received, for each of the years for which my Department has reliable information, is set out in the table below.

Business Year	Numbers			
	Received ¹	Decided ²	Approved	Refused
2002/03	55	49	44	5
2003/04	57	39	30	9
2004/05	43	31	28	3
2005/06	47	38	37	1
2006/07	41	24	23	1
2007/08	44	30	29	1
2008/09*	36	15	12	3

* latest figures available up to 30 September 2008

1 All applications received in the year may not have had a decision issued within the same time period and applications decided in the year may not have been received in the same time period. Therefore direct comparisons between the figures can not be made. Applications received also include withdrawn applications.

2 Applications decided do not include withdrawn applications

Source: 02/03 to 08/09 Q2 Planning Service frozen databases.

Statistical information for the period up to end December 2008 will be available in March 2009.

Tullyvar Landfill Site in Aughnacloy

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of the Environment if the proposed increase of the Tullyvar landfill site in Aughnacloy meets the EU directives that it should be 0.5km from housing. (AQW 5363/09)

Minister of the Environment: There are no proposals to increase the size of the Tullyvar landfill site in Aughnacloy.

PPS21

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications are being assessed under PPS21, that were submitted before the introduction of PPS21. (AQW 5397/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department is currently reassessing all applications that were submitted before the introduction of PPS 21. This includes all those applications that were deferred as a result of the now obsolete draft Planning Policy Statement 14. The total number of applications being reassessed by the Agency is 2278. The breakdown by Division is as follows:

Divisional Planning Office	Total No. of applications previously deferred due to dPPs 14
Ballymena	335
Craigavon	711
Londonderry / Coleraine	267
Belfast	18
Downpatrick	158
Omagh / Enniskillen	789
Agency Total	2278

The previously 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 PPS 21.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment (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 5461/09)

Minister of the Environment: The current downturn in the local construction industry has had a direct impact on the number of planning applications received in my Department. Fee income derived from planning applications for the year ending 31 March 2009 is likely to be £16.7m, down £4.5m (or 21%) on fee income generated in the year ended 31 March 2008 (£21.3m).

As the Department's net budget, and therefore funding from DFP, is based upon receiving planning income in the current financial year of circa £21m, the Departmental Board has had to apply some reductions to the budgets of all the Department's business areas. As the Department received £2m from DFP at the December Monitoring round to help meet this shortfall in planning income, the reductions proposed by the Board need to deliver some £2.5m to cover in full the total expected shortfall (£4.5m). In the main these reductions for 2008/09 have been applied to:

- the salary budgets of most business areas for by not filling
- vacancies and cutting back on overtime and non-salary running costs (£0.47m);
- grant spend in respect of environmental protection and farming conservation practices (£0.5m);
- advertising, development plans and land registry costs in the Planning Service (£0.58m); and
- the Local Government Reform initiative (0.46m).

Additionally even if a planning application is approved it may not be implemented due to funding difficulties or changes in the market (e.g. demand for housing). There have also been a number of instances where development has started but has not been completed which has clear environmental and amenity impacts in urban and rural areas.

While no significant changes have been made to existing policies and practices to address these effects, my Department continues to work towards fulfilling the commitments set out in the Programme for Government (PfG), which places the economy as its top priority. The PfG refers to a six month target being applied to large scale planning proposals where pre-application discussions (PADs) have taken place. These are proposals which

are considered to have significant economic or social implications for the whole or a substantial part of Northern Ireland. Two Strategic Projects teams have been created to specifically handle these types of applications.

Those applications which do not fall within this category will still be given priority within the planning system in terms of their processing and measures are already in place to this effect. Guidance on prioritisation was issued to all Divisional Offices in July 2006 clarifying that priority should be given to applications on which grant-aid may depend, as well as to certain commercial, industrial, social, and infrastructure proposals which have a clear strategic, employment, community or public interest dimension.

In general terms my Department is committed to managing the impact of the economic downturn in the context of the Executive's collective approach to the situation. The Executive is committed to doing all that it can to protect local people and business from the worst effects of the economic downturn and the issue is a standing item of Executive Business. The package of measures agreed by the Executive and announced on 15 December 2008 is part of a continuing monitoring and response initiative. The current priorities of the PfG remain valid and while the economic context is currently much more difficult than could have been anticipated, I remain committed to delivering on the relevant PfG commitments.

Street Lighting

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how will he ensure that developers provide adequate street lighting and roads in new developments, to allow the developments to be adapted. (AQW 5498/09)

Minister of the Environment: In the determination of planning applications, my Department consults the Department for Regional Development (DRD) Roads Service which has responsibility for the adoption of roads and the provision of street lighting.

As part of the planning application process, developers indicate on the plans submitted for approval those areas that are to be adopted for future maintenance by the Roads Service. That Service agrees these as part of the planning process but the adoption of the streets is made under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 and the Private Streets (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 which provide the statutory basis for adoption. Developers will normally need to enter into formal agreements/bonds with Roads Service so that, on completion, the roads become highways maintainable at the public expense.

The provision and maintenance of street lighting is solely a matter for DRD Roads Service and the developers.

Water Framework Directive

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his work with the Republic of Ireland government to implement the Water Framework Directive in the North-Western and Neagh-Bann river basin districts. (AQW 5499/09)

Minister of the Environment: One of the objectives of the Water Framework Directive is to promote common approaches, standards and measures for water management across Member States. The implementation of the Directive therefore requires close co-operation and co-ordination between my officials and those in the Republic of Ireland, at both a policy and technical level, particularly in relation to the production of single plans for the International River Basin Districts, including the North Western and the Neagh Bann. At a policy level, co-ordination takes place through quarterly meetings of the North South Water Framework Directive Co-ordination Group. The North South Technical Advisory Group facilitates co-operation on technical and scientific aspects

The draft River Basin Management Plans, which are currently out for public consultation in both jurisdictions, contain a "Working Together" document which describes the continuing co-ordination which takes place.

Former Prison Buildings at the Maze

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment if he will rescind the listing order on the former prison buildings at the Maze. (AQW 5504/09)

Minister of the Environment: The decisions to list and schedule structures at the Maze were taken only after a detailed examination and consideration of the architectural and historic significance of the site and buildings had been carried out.

The process of assessment for this site followed on from the assessment of Ebrington Barracks in Londonderry, a similar complex site, and follows best practice. A holistic assessment was made of the entire site before individual buildings of interest were identified and researched in more detail.

In the case of the Maze, the detailed research and overview was commissioned by the owners OFMDFM. The work was carried out by an English company – CgMs Consulting (who had also carried out an evaluation at Greenham Common). The then Environment and Heritage Service considered these views when making its recommendations to statutory consultees.

Listed buildings can be delisted if it can be shown that they do not meet the legislative test which requires them to be of ‘special architectural or historical interest’. This may be because some major change has occurred in the intervening years since the building was first listed or because a new historical fact has been unearthed, such as that the building is a complete rebuild and is therefore much younger than previously thought.

In the case of the Maze, following extensive research, a detailed consideration has concluded that the buildings listed meet the test of the legislation. However, following previous concerns on this issue, I have already asked the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to carry out a further review of the listing and potential for delisting on this site. I would expect that this will be carried out in due course.

Planning Policy Statement 8

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment if management companies that are not (i) a registered charitable trust; or (ii) supported by a charitable trust, satisfy the requirements of his Department’s Planning Policy Statement 8 Open Space, Sport and Outdoor. (AQW 5518/09)

Minister of the Environment: A properly constituted residents’ association with an associated management company would be an acceptable arrangement under Policy OS 2 of Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation.

Reducing Packaging

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what he is doing to reduce the amount of packaging on products in stores and supermarkets. (AQW 5531/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department currently provides funding towards the work of WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), a ‘not for profit’ company which seeks to achieve waste reductions and increased recycling. WRAP has entered into a voluntary agreement (“the Courtauld Commitment”) with the major UK grocery organisations, designed to reduce the amount of packaging and food waste that ends up in household bins. In 2008, this agreement led to zero growth in packaging, despite increases in sales and population.

The Courtauld Commitment also seeks to deliver absolute reductions in packaging waste by 2010, and a significant reduction in food waste. In order to achieve this, signatories to the Commitment are working in partnership with WRAP to develop innovative packaging solutions and technologies across the whole supply chain.

My officials are also currently participating in a UK-wide strategic review of packaging policy. One of the objectives of that review is to minimise the environmental impact of packaging, without compromising its ability to protect the product. We anticipate that the new strategy will encourage more prevention of excess packaging at source and increased re-use and recycling.

The NI Waste Management Strategy gives highest priority to waste prevention. My officials are working to develop a waste communications strategy to ensure effective delivery of key messages, including messages on avoidance of excess packaging. This is essential if we are to bring about the changes necessary to reduce waste and improve environmental quality.

I also propose to revise the “Wake up to Waste” website to deliver up to date and relevant information designed to encourage behavioural change. I anticipate that this will include direct messages to businesses on waste prevention and packaging reduction.

Disposal of Unlicensed Motor Vehicles

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what was the total cost of the removal and disposal of unlicensed motor vehicles in each constituency, in the last year. (AQW 5575/09)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an Excepted Matter, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport but it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport (DfT).

There is a UK-wide contract for a wide-range of activities relating to the detection, immobilisation and removal of unlicensed vehicles, which is awarded and administered by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea. I am informed that this contract does not feature a specific cost for the removal and disposal of these vehicles. The information requested is therefore not available.

Wildfowlers Association

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment if he will support the Wildfowlers Association and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation to retain the curlew on the quarry list. (AQW 5588/09)

Minister of the Environment: The review of the Wildlife Order proposed removing the curlew from the quarry list, due to conservation concerns. This proposal resulted in relevant conservation and sporting interests looking at various options to maintain a sustainable Curlew population.

My officials are working in partnership with these bodies to determine positive conservation benefits. A final decision on the future status of the species has yet to be taken.

Waste Illegally Dumped at Lough Cowey

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 4974/09, to detail the techniques employed to (i) establish the nature of waste; and (ii) test the waste, illegally dumped at Lough Cowey during 2008. (AQW 5650/09)

Minister of the Environment: The material deposited at the Lough Cowey site was easily identifiable, from a visual inspection on site, as construction waste containing concrete waste, with some plastic. Being inert material that would not break down and leach into the surrounding soil and water, the material was taken as neither a serious nor an immediate threat to the environment. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency therefore deemed it unnecessary to perform any further tests on it.

Illegal Waste

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment if the repatriation of illegal waste from sites at Slattinagy, Garrison and Trillick was discussed at the recent North/South Ministerial Council meetings; and to provide an update. (AQW 5667/09)

Minister of the Environment: At the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Plenary format on 23rd January 2009 Ministers noted the progress that is being made on the removal of illegally dumped waste. However repatriation of illegal waste from sites at Slattinagh, Garrison and Trillick was not specifically discussed.

Officials from my Department have been involved in discussions with counterparts from the Department for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government aimed at resolving the remaining issues surrounding the scope of the work, the methods to be employed and the apportionment of costs. I hope that the necessary agreement can be reached within the next month to allow the procurement process to commence which will lead to the award of a contract for the repatriation of the waste.

Reintroduction of Bumble Bees

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are being taken to reintroduce the rare bumble bee, *bombus distinguendus* to Northern Ireland. (AQW 5702/09)

Minister of the Environment: There are no plans to re-introduce the great yellow bumble bee *Bombus distinguendus* to Northern Ireland. The species is currently listed as a Northern Ireland priority biodiversity species. However, there has been no confirmed sighting of the species in recent years despite intensive survey effort and it is now being considered for removal from this list.

Any reintroduction of the species would first require the restoration or creation of extensive areas of suitable flower-rich habitat. The designation and management of coastal grassland within Areas of Special Scientific Interest and lands under agri-environment schemes such as the Countryside Management Scheme will help restore areas which may become suitable for the species.

However, it is likely to be some time before suitable habitats become self sustaining and sufficiently widespread to allow for a viable population of the great yellow bumble bee to re-colonise or to be reintroduced.

High Hedges

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW4232/09, if because of public demand, he would consider expediting the legislation for high hedges prior to May 2011 and the new Council Structures under the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 5751/09)

Minister of the Environment: I am very much aware of the ongoing interest in this subject and the calls for new laws to be introduced in Northern Ireland to help people who are adversely affected by nuisance high hedges deal with the problem. However, my current position on this matter is determined by significant resource constraints, wider competing priorities and the impact on district councils of the Review of Public Administration. I am, therefore, unable to expedite this matter at this time.

High Hedges

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his Department's assessment of the nuisance hedge problem; (ii) to list all the actions required by his Department and the Assembly, to introduce legislation to deal with this issue; (iii) to detail the reasons why he does not intend to engage with Councils until after elections in May 2011; and (iv) whether he will review that position. (AQW 5783/09)

Minister of the Environment: In August 2005 my Department published a consultation document and questionnaire seeking information on the scale and geographical spread of problems with nuisance high hedges in Northern Ireland. The consultation exercise confirmed that the high hedge problem in Northern Ireland is at least on a par with that in England and Wales and it was accepted that legislation was necessary to deal with the problem. This assessment of the nuisance high hedges problem has not changed.

Once a decision is taken to progress work on high hedges legislation the next stage would be to produce a detailed consultation document on the proposed details of the system of high hedge control to be enshrined in the legislation and a regulatory impact assessment. The consultation would inform the subsequent drafting of the legislation which would in due course, be laid before the Assembly and would be required to go through the various legislative stages in the Assembly.

It is likely, given the experiences of similar legislation elsewhere, that a substantial Bill would be required and detailed supporting subordinate legislation covering complaints/appeals mechanisms, together with a range of guidance documents would also be needed. All of this would be drawn up by the Department and be subject to the necessary consultation arrangements and Assembly processes.

Any new scheme provided for by the legislation to deal with the issue of high hedges will be operated by local government and I would not underestimate the amount of additional work such a scheme would have on district councils, particularly during the early stages of the scheme's operation when the existing problems affecting many householders would need to be dealt with. It is with this in mind, together with the competing priorities and resource constraints I am facing, that I have decided not to progress the development of policy and legislation on this matter until after the eleven new Councils have been elected in May 2011. This also allows me to focus Departmental staff resources on higher priority environmental issues over the coming years.

I regularly review my priorities with my officials, and whilst I am very much aware of the ongoing interest in this subject and the calls for new laws to be introduced in Northern Ireland to help people who are adversely

affected by nuisance high hedges deal with the problem, the circumstances I described above have not changed since I made my decision and I will only be revisiting the issue when the new Councils have been elected in 2011.

Divisional Planning Offices

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications have been lodged with the Divisional Planning Office, Rathkeltair House by the Ards Borough Council in each month from September 2008. (AQW 5786/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Downpatrick Divisional Planning Office has received only one application from Ards Borough Council from September 2008 to date. This application was received in September 2008 and was for the conversion of a caretaker's cottage at Dunover Road, Ballywalter.

“Act on CO2” Television Advertisement

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how much correspondence he has received in relation to his decision on the “Act on CO2” television advertisement and how many were in favour of the position he has adopted. (AQW 5794/09)

Minister of the Environment: I have received 354 pieces of correspondence in relation to the “Act on CO2” television advertisement. 80% of the correspondents were in favour of my position.

High Hedges

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to introduce legislation to deal with disputes over high hedges in residential areas. (AQW 5797/09)

Minister of the Environment: As any scheme to deal with the issue of high hedges will be operated by local government I must be conscious of the impact on Councils of the Review of Public Administration and our intention to implement the agreed local government reorganisation package by 2011. I also have to be mindful of the competing priorities and resource constraints I am facing. In these circumstances, I intend to undertake the engagement process with the eleven new Councils once they have been elected in May 2011.

Illegal Fly Postering

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what policies are available to local authorities to deal with illegal fly postering. (AQW 5798/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 gives district councils the power to issue a notice requiring the removal of any placard or poster which is displayed in contravention of any regulations made under Article 67 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

District Councils are of course also able to introduce initiatives in their respective areas to help to deal with local environmental problems, including illegal fly posting.

Illegal Fly Postering

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what legal action has been taken on illegal fly postering in each of the District Council areas, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5799/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not hold information centrally about the extent of legal action taken on illegal fly posting in each of the District Council areas across Northern Ireland.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Civil Service

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil service staff employed by his Department, broken down by (i) grade; (ii) core departmental staff; and (iii) agency workers, at (a) May 2007; and (b) January 2009. (AQW 4905/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The number of civil service staff employed by my Department, broken down by (i) grade, (ii) core departmental staff; and (iii) agency workers is provided in the attached tables.

DFP CORE

Grades (inc. analogous)	Position @1 May 2007	Position @ 1 January 2009
Senior Civil Service	39	39
Grade 6	45	53
Grade 7	165	168
Deputy Principal	277	303
Staff Officer	265	301
Executive Officer 1	221	251
Executive Officer 2	211	284
Administrative Officer	317	389
Administrative Assistant	197	141
Industrial	32	28
Total	1769	1957

DFP AGENCIES

Grades (inc. analogous)	Position @1 May 2007	Position @ 1 January 2009
Senior Civil Service	6	8
Grade 6	15	20
Grade 7	53	67
Deputy Principal	157	204
Staff Officer	194	235
Executive Officer 1	88	186
Executive Officer 2	139	174
Administrative Officer	437	499
Administrative Assistant	182	109
Total	1271	1502

Rates Assistance Package

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to breakdown the value of the £8m rates assistance package broken down by each of the local government districts. (AQW 5422/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The package of assistance 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 (BT) and Ministry of Defence (MOD) valuations over five years, a benefit estimated to be worth up to £3.3m next year.

I will also provide for the removal of the 3% cost for councils attributable to housing benefit administration from 2008/09 and reduce the impact of the landlord allowance on councils, for NIHE properties, over 2008/09 and 2009/10, pending a review of the allowance prior to the introduction of the rating of empty homes. This change to the way councils' net revenues are calculated could provide a benefit of up to £4m next year. 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. This will provide a one off benefit to councils of around £600,000.

The figures in relation to the BT and MOD repayments are indicative at this stage and represent the estimated maximum possible assistance that could be provided to councils next year. They are expected to fluctuate because the benefit of the MOD and BT offset is dependent on the extent that individual councils would otherwise have been required to repay. Furthermore, the position of individual councils at finalisation is particularly difficult to gauge during this period of unprecedented economic uncertainty. For these reasons is not possible to provide a precise breakdown of the assistance to each council at this stage. However, once there is greater certainty I will ensure that the information is provided.

Capital Expenditure

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answer to AQW4873/09, to confirm that the capital expenditure will be £1.4bn by 31 March 2009. (AQW 5430/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The latest forecasts suggest that capital expenditure by Northern Ireland departments will be over £1.4 billion in 2008-09. Information regarding the actual level of capital expenditure by Northern Ireland departments in this financial year will not be available until June 2009, as part of Provisional Outturn.

ERINI Document

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel on what date did he and/or his officials receive the ERNI document dated Feb 2009 marked 'Draft Paper strictly embargoed until further notice'. (AQW 5471/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Neither I nor my officials have received an ERINI document which is dated Feb 2009 marked 'Draft Paper strictly embargoed until further notice'.

Civil Service

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of Civil Service employees who travel to work (i) from Londonderry/Derry to Belfast; and (ii) from Belfast to Londonderry/Derry, broken down by government Department. (AQW 5555/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Based on information currently held the details are as follows:-

Staff with a home address of Belfast and who work in Londonderry by Department;

DETI	DSD	Total
1	4	5

Staff with a home address of Londonderry and who work in Belfast by Department;

DARD	DEL	DETI	DHSSPS	DRD	DSD	DE	DOE	DFP	OFMDFM	Total
7	13	1	7	14	79	12	16	38	4	191

It should be noted that home addresses are not held in respect of all staff. The records held also do not provide any details on (i) those staff who may use temporary accommodation or (ii) whether individuals travel on a daily basis.

Departmental and Agency Staff

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the number of staff in each Government Department and Agency who are currently seeking transfers out of the Belfast area to the North West; and what is the average length of waiting time for a transfer to be granted. (AQW 5573/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel:

Based on information currently held, staff working in the Belfast area with a transfer request for Londonderry, Limavady or Coleraine by Department/Agency is as follows:-

DARD	DEL	DCAL	DETI	DHSSPS	DRD	DSD (including SSA)	DE	DOE	DFP	NIO	OFMDFM	Total
16	32	3	6	10	26	207	2	54	67	10	6	439

Information in relation to the average length of waiting time for a transfer to be granted is not held.

Small Business Rates Relief Scheme

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much the proposed small business rates relief scheme will cost annually. (AQW 5689/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The estimated annual cost of the scheme is £7.9m, based on applying NAV limits which are equivalent to those that exist under the Welsh small business rate relief scheme.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Free Personal Care

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made preparing for the introduction of free personal care; and for his assessment of whether it will be implemented in 2010. (AQW 4135/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): My officials conducted the cost update on free personal care which I promised in the Assembly debate on 29 May 2007. I have considered this issue very carefully against the competing priorities I face across the health service and have concluded that free personal care in residential and nursing homes is not affordable within the current CSR period. I will, however, keep the issue under review.

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to break down by Health and Social Care Trusts, the cost of medical negligence claims, for the last financial year. (AQW 4341/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested has been set out in the table below.

Cost of Medical Negligence 2007/08		
HSC Trust	Settlement	Third Party Legal Costs
Northern	£1,120,481	£518,695
Western	£589,000	£577,000
South Eastern	£1,478,556	£592,988

Cost of Medical Negligence 2007/08		
HSC Trust	Settlement	Third Party Legal Costs
Southern	£500	£352
Belfast	£5,093,758	£1,328,282
NI Ambulance	£7,250	£2,144

The total cost of medical negligence claims in 2007/2008 was £11.3 million. This figure includes settlement costs and third party legal costs and it represents 0.38% of all the HSC Trusts' total operating costs for 2007/2008.

The Settlement figures in the table are payments made to Claimants by the Trusts. The Third Party Legal Cost figures are legal costs incurred by, or on behalf of, the Claimant which were reimbursed by the HSC Trusts.

Capital Infrastructure Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all capital infrastructure projects (i) under construction; (ii) in the procurement process; or (iii) to be advertised in this financial year, in the Strangford constituency and to detail the aggregated value of each. (AQW 4900/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have been advised by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust that a programme of office refurbishment and windows replacement commenced at Scrabo Children's Unit on 1 February 2009, at a total cost of £350k. In addition some minor refurbishment work is ongoing at Portaferry Health Centre at a cost of £40k.

The Trust has also advised that there are no capital infrastructure projects currently in procurement or scheduled to be advertised in this financial year in the Strangford area.

Rapid Response Vehicles

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the (i) potential problems; and (ii) unions issues, following the introduction of Rapid Response Vehicles. (AQW 5218/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Rapid response vehicles (RRVs) were introduced by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) in 2003. Since then, no problems specifically relating to their introduction have been identified.

It is the responsibility of NIAS to deal with union issues regarding any service development. I have been advised that NIAS has been fully engaged with its recognised trade unions about the introduction of RRVs.

Epilepsy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance has been offered by experts from other countries to assist those with (i) epilepsy; and (ii) cerebral palsy. (AQW 5240/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Experts from other countries do not offer assistance to those suffering from epilepsy and cerebral palsy within Northern Ireland as a matter of course.

Referrals outside Northern Ireland are made on the basis of clinical need. Children with complex epilepsy may be referred to a specialist centre in the UK, usually Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in London, which provides a supra-regional epilepsy service. Referral may be for assessment of the feasibility of epilepsy surgery, for diagnostic investigations, including EEG telemetry, which may not be available locally and to access further specialist opinion in cases of diagnostic uncertainty.

Children who are diagnosed with cerebral palsy are initially assessed by a paediatric-led multi-disciplinary team. Health and Social Care Trusts contract with a number of voluntary and independent organisations to provide a range of services for people with disabilities, including epilepsy and cerebral palsy. These organisations have expertise in working with people with physical and sensory disabilities.

Rathmoyle Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to where workers employed at Rathmoyle Home will be re-located; and how many will have to change the sector in which they work, under the proposed closure. (AQW 5244/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision has been taken on the future of Rathmoyle House as proposals from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust are still out for consultation. However, the NHSCT has advised that, should there be any changes following the consultation, those changes would be taken forward in line with the Trust's Human Resource Strategy and would include partnership approaches in consultation with staff and unions.

Rathmoyle Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety can he guarantee that (i) communal accommodation; (ii) individual units; and (iii) private home caring will be provided for elderly residents in Moyle, if Rathmoyle Home closes. (AQW 5245/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision on the future of Rathmoyle House has been taken. However, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) has advised that their ambition is to replace Rathmoyle with modern supported living accommodation and care and support services, and that those replacement services which the Trust would provide in the event of closure, will take account of the needs of existing and future residents.

Rathmoyle Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when a final decision will be made on the proposal to close Rathmoyle Home. (AQW 5246/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust's consultation will finish on 6th March. The Trust will then give consideration to all the views raised in the consultation before making a decision on the future of Rathmoyle and, if necessary refer the proposal to me for a final decision. Given that the consultation has not yet finished, it is not possible at this point to predict when a final decision will be taken.

Rathmoyle Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the proposal to close Rathmoyle will be rural-proofed. (AQW 5247/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision has been taken to close Rathmoyle. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have advised that the proposal for Rathmoyle is about replacement of accommodation and extending the range of care and support options for older people into the future. The Trust proposes to replace the existing accommodation with modern accommodation on the same site if possible, and if not, in the same locality. The proposals take account of the location of all statutory homes in order that the programme of replacement would be carried out uniformly across the Trust's geographical area. As the proposal is one of replacement rather than closure, the Trust have advised that it was not considered necessary to rural-proof the proposals for Rathmoyle.

Rathmoyle Home

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide more detail than is in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust's consultation document on the scoring mechanism used in the decision to propose closure of Rathmoyle Home. (AQW 5248/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social care trust has advised that the assessment criteria used to identify those statutory homes suitable for replacement was drawn up

by the Trust's Residential Homes Management Team (RHMT) led by the Assistant Director with responsibility for residential homes.

All of the Trust's statutory homes were assessed against the criteria set out in the Trust's consultation document, and scored accordingly by the RHMT. Of the two homes scored in the Coleraine/Ballymoney/Moyle area, Rathmoyle scored less favourably in terms of resident's privacy and flexibility for future development on the existing site given the prevalence of double rooms in Rathmoyle and limited physical space.

Departmental Spend

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is his Department's spending per head of population, in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 5255/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below shows the amount planned to be spent per head of population based on local commissioning groups during the financial year 2008/09, after population figures have been adjusted for need.

Needs weighted populations are used in financial commissioning as they take into account age, gender and any additional health and social care requirements for populations.

	Spend per Head of Needs Weighted Population (£)
Belfast	1,610
North	1,500
South	1,450
South East	1,500
West	1,490

- Figures taken from Strategic Resources Framework 2008/09 and have been rounded to nearest £10

Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has details of which Health and Social Care Trusts are the most efficient. (AQW 5256/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The overall efficiency of each Trust is not possible to measure definitively, as Trusts engage in a widely varied range and mix of activities which cannot be fully compared on a consistent basis.

However I am of the view that all Trusts have the capacity to be more efficient and therefore they have all been required to contribute to the CSR efficiencies targets.

Inherited Legacy Debt

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of inherited legacy debt, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5257/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Upon the creation of the five new health and social care trusts on 1 April 2007, only one former trust, Sperrin Lakeland, incurred a revenue deficit of £3.36m in 2006/07. This will only need to be recovered in the event that the Western Trust fails to achieve financial break-even in 2008/09.

Ravara House, Bangor

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why Ravara House, Bangor is not accepting new residents. (AQW 5258/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has advised that, while it continues to offer permanent Elderly Mentally Infirm residential care places, no new permanent frail elderly placements have been made in statutory residential homes given decreasing demand and the Trust's focus on supporting people in their own homes. The Trust has focused resources on responding to demand for community based services such as intermediate, respite and domiciliary care in order to support carers and help people maintain their independence in their own homes.

Health Service Staff

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) surgeons; (ii) consultants; (iii) doctors; (iv) nurses; (v) middle managers; (vi) administrative staff there are in the Health Service. (AQW 5282/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of staff employed in the above selected grades within Northern Ireland Health and Social Care is given in the table below.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF STAFF EMPLOYED WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE, BY SELECTED GROUP, AS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2008.

Grade	Staff Employed	
	Headcount	WTE1
Surgeons ²	400	367.2
Consultants ³	1,341	1,264.4
Doctors ⁴	3,705	3,461.0
Qualified Nursing Staff	16,346	13,963.2
Nurse Support Staff	4,663	3,990.5
Middle Managers ⁵	N/A	N/A
Administrative Staff	12,600	11,009.9

Source: Surgeons - NI Health & Social Care Trust
Other Staff Groups – Human Resource Management System

Notes:

1. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.
2. 'Surgeons' are included within both of the staff groups 'Consultants' and 'Doctors'. Surgeons has been defined as Medical and Dental Staff at Consultant, Staff Grade and Associate Specialist Grades who are linked to a service where surgical procedures are likely to be carried out, including General Surgery, ENT, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Trauma & Orthopaedics, Urology, Orthodontics, Dentistry, Ophthalmic Surgery and Otolaryngology.
3. 'Consultants' include both Medical and Dental Consultants.
4. 'Doctors' include all grades of Medical Staff including Consultant, Staff Grade, Associate Specialist, General & Hospital Practitioners, Medical Officers and Medics at Training Grades.
5. Information on the number of Middle Managers is not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Many middle managers will be subsumed within the Administration Staff grade but other professional staff, with middle level managerial responsibilities, will also be working across other staff groups.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many qualified dental technicians from the full-time course at the Royal Victoria Hospital School of Dentistry have been employed by the Health Service; and to estimate how many went on to work in the commercial sector, in the past 5 years. (AQW 5306/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 19 dental technicians have qualified in the 5 year period from 2004. 12 are employed by private labs, 2 are employed at the School Dentistry, 2 have joined the British Army Dental Corp and 3 have continued into further education (BSc Dental Technology).

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department carries out a (i) skills assessment; and (ii) workforce review of dental technology. (AQW 5307/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of the cycle of workforce reviews, the dental care professionals workforce was reviewed in 2005 and this included dental technicians. These reviews include an examination of education and training issues. A further dental workforce review is planned for the 2009/10 financial year and will encompass dental technology. The recommendations of this review will inform future commissioning levels.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Minister intends to review dental technology since it is required by law for dental technicians to hold a recognised qualification. (AQW 5308/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A review of the dental workforce is scheduled for the 2009/10 financial year. This review will encompass dental technology.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware that the General Dental Council may allow individuals to register as a dental technician without a recognised qualification; and for his assessment as to whether this practice is acceptable. (AQW 5309/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The General Dental Council is a regulatory body and has the remit to decide how to administer registration. I am confident that patient protection is at the heart of the GDC decision.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation the General Dental Council had with his Department about dental care professionals registering with the General Dental Council; and for an estimate of the potential impact this may have on dental care jobs. (AQW 5310/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The GDC policy is to regulate and register all dental care professionals (DCPs) and a public consultation was carried out on the proposed changes. In addition, my Department, in conjunction with the GDC, organised a series of roadshows in Northern Ireland to consult with local DCPs. These events took place in March 2003 and March 2005 and very large numbers of DCPs attended these events. The Chief Dental Officer sits as an associate member of the GDC and was consulted on this issue throughout the period of the policy change.

Latest statistics from the GDC indicate a very high uptake of registration by dental care professionals in Northern Ireland which is encouraging and should ensure continuity of care for patients.

Independent Living

Mrs M O'Neill asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people are using direct payments to pay for their care package; (ii) of those using direct payments how many are also in receipt of funding from the Independent Living (Extension) Fund and the Independent Living (1993) Fund; and (iii) how many direct payment users are in receipt of a care package of more than £325. (AQW 5332/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i) 1,134 persons were using direct payments to pay for their care package at 31 December 2008;

- (ii) Information on those receiving funding from the Independent Living (Extension) Fund and the Independent Living (1993) Fund is not collected centrally by the DHSSPS. The Independent Living Fund is a non-Departmental body whose sponsor Department is the Department for Social Development; and,
- (iii) Information on the number of persons receiving a care package of more than £325 is not collected centrally, and if available, could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Residential Home Places

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) residential home places; and (ii) nursing care places are provided by (a) statutory providers; and (b) non statutory providers, in each District Council area. (AQW 5335/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The following table details information at 30 June 2008:

Local Government District	(i) Number of Residential Places Available*		(ii) Number of Available Nursing Care Beds*	
	(a) Statutory	(b) Independent	(a) Statutory	(b) Independent
Antrim	68	111	-	414
Ards	79	128	-	449
Armagh	-	224	-	403
Ballymena	38	130	-	349
Ballymoney	29	111	-	81
Banbridge	91	16	-	188
Belfast	328	786	10	1,537
Carrickfergus	86	45	-	228
Castlereagh	70	155	-	387
Coleraine	6	144	-	314
Cookstown	29	68	-	178
Craigavon	-	109	-	343
Derry	121	170	-	386
Down	118	320	-	441
Dungannon	36	49	-	449
Fermanagh	48	201	-	492
Larne	41	67	-	141
Limavady	32	17	-	149
Lisburn	143	86	-	668
Magherafelt	3	71	-	118
Moyle	39	42	-	84
Newry & Mourne	59	43	-	434
Newtownabbey	81	47	-	557
North Down	110	373	-	588
Omagh	43	122	-	223
Strabane	34	38	-	188
Northern Ireland	1,732	3,673	10	9,789

* Residential places in nursing homes have been included in part (i) and excluded from part (ii).

** There is no statutory provision in nursing homes. However, Forest Lodge in Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast has 10 available nursing care beds.

Funding for Counselling

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to funding across Trusts for counselling by the community and voluntary sector (i) how much was allocated; (ii) what was the total amount in applications; and (iii) what was the shortfall amount. (AQW 5355/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The systems operating in the Trusts do not hold the information requested and it could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Waiting Times for Counselling

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the waiting times for counselling, in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 5356/09)

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

Waiting Times for Counselling

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the waiting times on referrals to community and voluntary sector for counselling, in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5357/09)

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

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are enough fully qualified, technical dental staff to meet the demands of all Health Service patients. (AQW 5376/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department monitors the number of Dental Care professionals in the workforce as part of its workforce planning mechanism. Although the majority of dental technicians are employed by the private sector my Department commissions training for 5 dental technicians annually, to ensure a continuous supply of dental technicians for the hospital sector in NI. In addition, as dental technicians do not directly deliver service to patients, the function can be delivered from any part of the UK or further afield.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider supporting the course devised by the Dental Laboratories Association for Northern Ireland and the Belfast Dental School to meet any skills gap. (AQW 5377/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The course recommended by the DLA does not lead to immediate GDC registration and therefore is not an appropriate course to support. As indicated in my response to AQ 3889/09 my Department cannot fund the commercial sector, however we do fund a full time course for 5 dental technicians and have made £120K per year available for CPD for dental care professionals, which include dental technicians.

Dental Technicians

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to the answer to AQW 3889/09, to provide details about his Department's discussions with Department for Employment and Learning to facilitate part-time training for dental technicians. (AQW 5378/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has been engaged in discussions with local further education providers to look at options for providing part time training. Due to other business

priorities, discussions with the Department for Employment and Learning have yet to commence, however they will be initiated as soon as possible.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (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 5402/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While household costs have risen and job security has been threatened, to date, the economic downturn has had limited direct impact on the delivery of current policies. However, it is clear from the evidence that social, economic and environmental conditions play a major role in determining health. Those who are poorer or disadvantaged are more likely to face more illness during their lifetime and die younger than those who are better off. In Northern Ireland there are already stark inequalities in health for example between those living in the most deprived areas and Northern Ireland overall. Any long term increase in unemployment levels therefore has the potential to be detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing of an increased proportion of our population and I foresee an increased demand for intervention and support in this area.

My Department has taken a number of actions that have a real and immediate impact to the public and the wider Northern Ireland economy. From 1 January 2009 I have reduced the prescription charge per item to £3 and plan to abolish the charge entirely from 1 April 2009. Reducing these charges allows patients to access essential medication as they deal with the stress of life threatening illnesses, experience financial difficulties through the general rise in household costs or through being out of work.

In addition, in line with other government Departments, DHSSPS has committed to paying businesses within 10 days and guidance has been issued to all Health and Social Care bodies concerning the new commitment to paying businesses within 10 days subject of receipt of goods and or invoice. Furthermore, I am pressing ahead to ensure that almost £700m of capital funding is being invested during the CSR period to deliver first class facilities across the service.

Departmental Reports

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (a) reports; (b) strategy papers; (c) policy statements; and (d) consultation documents were produced in each of the last five years; and what was (i) the total cost; (ii) the number of copies; (iii) the cost of printing; and (iv) the cost of designing. (AQW 5424/09)

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

Health Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent by the Health Service on purchasing flowers and plants in each of the last five years. (AQW 5425/09)

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

Health Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent by the Health Service on purchasing artwork, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5426/09)

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

North South Ministerial Council Meeting

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his reasons for not attending the North South Ministerial Council meeting on the 23 January 2009, particularly given that issues such as suicide prevention and child protection were discussed. (AQW 5433/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I was unable to attend the NSMC Meeting in the Plenary Format on 23rd January. I note however that none of the items on the agenda for substantive discussion were within my specific remit. Suicide Prevention and Child Protection were to be included under the heading of a general progress report and I ensured that the First and deputy First Ministers were supplied with appropriate briefing on these topics, along with other health issues covered under the heading of the North West Gateway Initiative.

Sexual and Physical Abuse

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what (i) statutory and (ii) non statutory services are provided to children and young people who have suffered sexual and/or physical abuse, in each constituency. (AQW 5438/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the provision of statutory and non-statutory services to children who have suffered sexual and/or physical abuse is not held by constituency.

Health Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was spent by the Health Service on purchasing bottled water, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5460/09)

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

Health Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list all capital infrastructure investment projects in the Health Service (i) for this year and (ii) planned for next year, and the value of the each investment. (AQW 5489/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My approved capital budgets for 2008/09 and 2009/10, including assumed income from asset sales, are £204m and £211m respectively. Within these amounts there are annual allocations for NIFRS, NIAS, ICT, Trust General Capital and UK-wide initiatives such as pandemic flu. In 2008/09 these allocations total approximately £70 million, which, when added to the projects detailed in the table below, show that the capital budget is fully committed in 2008/09.

Given that business cases for a number of planned schemes have not yet been approved, the table below includes only projects that are contractually committed in 2009/10.

Trust	Project	2008-09	2009-10
Belfast	Shankill Health & Well Being Centre	£1,019,000	£5,221,000
Belfast	Forest Lodge	£211,000	£0
Belfast	CONICAR at Iveagh	£858,000	£2,674,000
Belfast	Foster Green Regional Adolescent Psychiatric Unit	£3,018,000	£4,857,000
Belfast	Foster Green Regional Childrens Psychiatric Unit	£1,115,000	£5,049,000
Belfast	Enler	£988,000	£1,012,000
Belfast	Royal - Victoria Pharmaceuticals	£4,113,000	£3,464,000
Belfast	RVH Energy Centre	£1,000,000	£270,000
Belfast	Royal - Maternity Interim Scheme (MES)	£2,400,000	£476,190

Trust	Project	2008-09	2009-10
Belfast	Beechall Health & Care Centre	£1,348,000	£5,030,000
Belfast	Musgrave Park Neurology Ward	£500,000	£1,450,000
Belfast	QUB Medical School	£2,600,000	£388,143
Belfast	Mater Fairview Extension	£27,000	£0
Belfast	RVH -Critical Care Block	£15,100,000	£24,930,000
Belfast	Posijet	£0	£118,000
Belfast	RVH - Phase 2 IT	£500,000	£1,000,000
Belfast	Grove Health and Wellbeing Centre	£721,000	£0
Belfast	Lucentis Ophthalmology	£33,000	£442,000
Belfast	Castlereagh CTCC	£3,305,000	£142,857
Belfast	Muckamore Abbey Phase 1	£0	£200,000
Belfast	Muckamore Abbey Phase 2	£810,000	£470,000
Belfast	Muckamore Abbey Phase 3	£2,140,000	£60,000
Belfast	Muckamore Abbey Phase 4	£470,000	£1,150,000
Belfast	Somerton Road Children's Home	£15,000	£0
Northern	Inver House	£53,000	£0
Northern	Data Comms	£250,000	£0
Northern	Day Procedures/ Risk Assessment Unit	£10,000	£0
Northern	Carnview Children's Home	£866,000	£100,000
South Eastern	Lisburn Assesment and Resource Centre	£1,500,000	£1,500,000
South Eastern	Downe Hospital ICT Infrastructure	£1,741,287	£658,557
South Eastern	Ulster Hospital Phase A & Care of the Elderly	£18,814,000	£21,310,000
South Eastern	Downe Hospital Main Development	£23,886,000	£5,270,000
South Eastern	Bangor & Ards ISUs	£1,179,000	£22,000
South Eastern	Bayview	£1,106,000	£56,190
South Eastern	Specialist Breast & Endocrine Outpatient Unit - UCH	£425,000	£425,000
South Eastern	Downpatrick Children's Home	£15,000	£0
South Eastern	Urology	£42,000	£0
Southern	Newry SEC	£600,000	£2,188,000
Southern	Newry Childrens Home	£600,000	£1,660,000
Southern	Decontamination /scopes	£834,000	£0
Southern	Theatre 5 Replacement	£1,901,000	£60,000
Southern	Daisy Hill Car Park	£220,000	£0
Southern	Car Park at CAH	£400,000	£0
Southern	Catheterisation Laboratory	£62,000	£0
Southern	T&O Facility - Phases A&B	£2,682,000	£7,902,000
Southern	Portadown Health & Care Centre	£5,062,000	£10,159,000
Southern	Crisis Resource Centre (Blue Stone Centre)	£1,003,000	£0
Southern	Daisy Hill Renal	£1,210,000	£38,095

Trust	Project	2008-09	2009-10
Southern	Learning Disability Respite Unit Dungannon	£150,000	£0
Western	Gransha Mental Health Crisis Centre	£590,000	£221,905
Western	Omagh Centre	£356,000	£0
Western	Omagh Local Hospital Enabling Works	£3,900,000	£3,462,000
Western	Omagh Local Hospital – Programme Management & Design	£1,201,000	£1,402,000
Western	PCCI Programme Management Costs	£150,000	£0
Western	SW Hospital, Enabling Works	£1,644,000	£0
Western	SW Hospital Programme Management & Design	£1,750,000	£1,288,000
Western	Altnagelvin Phase 3.2A South Block	£11,370,000	£897,000
Western	Altnagelvin Phase 3.2B South Block Phase 2	£4,191,000	£8,377,000
Western	Hine Review Decontamination	£581,000	£0
NIFRS	Central Energy	£26,000	£0
NIAS	Ministerial Commitment - 2 Ambulances for Western Trust	£220,000	£0
Belfast	Central Energy	£0	£0
Northern	Central Energy	£32,000	£0
South Eastern	Central Energy	£211,000	£0
Southern	Central Energy	£474,000	£0
GALA	Case Management Solution	£30,000	£30,000
CSA	Server hardware replacement	£15,000	£0
NISCC	Telecoms system	£20,000	£0
NIBTSA	Storage Facility Extension	£185,000	£0
	Totals	£133,848,287	£125,430,938

Liver Transplants

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people received liver transplants in each of the last 5 years, and how many of these people needed transplants because of alcohol abuse problems. (AQW 5494/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Between 2004 and 2008, 3253 people in the UK received liver transplants, 97 from Northern Ireland. Of these people 17.7% had a primary diagnosis of alcoholic liver disease.

Whether an individual patient with a history of alcohol abuse is likely to benefit fully from a transplant is a matter of clinical judgement.

Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were diagnosed with epilepsy, and subsequently had the diagnosis withdrawn, in each of the last five years. (AQW 5542/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of people who were diagnosed with epilepsy, and subsequently had the diagnosis withdrawn is not available.

Procedure for Registering as Partially Sighted

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline correct procedure for registering as partially sighted. (AQW 5607/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following the patient's assessment, the Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI - NI 2005) may be completed by a Consultant Ophthalmologist to certify that the patient is eligible to be registered as sight impaired / partially sighted, or as severely sight impaired / blind under the provisions of the Supplementary Benefits (Requirements) Regulations (NI) 1983.

Subsequently, the patient's local Health and Social Services Trust will arrange, with the explicit consent of the patient, for his or her name to be added to the appropriate register. Registration is completely voluntary, and patients can choose to have their name removed at any time. If required, the Trust will also carry out an assessment of the patient's needs, and provide information about the services and benefits available.

Enniskillen Hospital

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of nursing staff in Enniskillen Hospital who have been issued redundancy notices since January 2009. (AQW 5662/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No redundancy notices have been issued to nursing staff in Enniskillen Hospital since January 2009.

Erne Hospital

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons for the delay in recruiting a replacement for Doctor Holmes at the Erne Hospital so that the Pain Clinic can recommence; and to provide a date for the Pain Clinic to recommence. (AQW 5665/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised by the Trust that the recruitment of a Pain Consultant is proving difficult due to the lack of availability of suitably qualified specialists.

The Trust will continue to maintain a pain service by providing extra clinics at the Tyrone County Hospital.

Emergency Nurse Practitioners

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses in the Altnagelvin Hospital; (i) applied to the Emergency Nurse Practitioners post graduate course, and (ii) were prohibited from taking their EMP post graduate course, by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the past five years. (AQW 5674/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information obtained from the Western Trust has identified the following for the years available. No nurses who had requested places on the ENP course were prohibited from undertaking the course.

Year	Applications received	Applications supported
07/08	1	1
08/09	1	1

Emergency Nurse Practitioners

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses in Tyrone County Hospital; (i) applied to the Emergency Nurse Practitioners post graduate course, and (ii) were prohibited from taking their EMP post graduate course, by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the past five years. (AQW 5675/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information obtained from the Western Trust has identified the following for the years available. No nurses who had requested places on the ENP course were prohibited from undertaking the course. It is of note that one candidate from Tyrone County hospital had requested a different course in 07/08 year and subsequently asked to transfer on to the ENP course at a late stage. The University of Ulster were unable to process the late application to the course and this candidate was deferred until 08/09 intake.

Year	Applications received	Applications supported
07/08	0	0
08/09	1	1

Emergency Nurse Practitioners

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many nurses in Erne Hospital; (i) applied to the Emergency Nurse Practitioners post graduate course, and (ii) were prohibited from taking their EMP post graduate course, by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the past five years. (AQW 5676/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information obtained from the Western Trust has identified the following for the years available. No nurses who had requested places on the ENP course were prohibited from undertaking the course.

Year	Applications received	Applications supported
07/08	0	0
08/09	2	2

Children Missing from Residential or Foster Care

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to recording children who go missing from residential or foster care, to detail (i) the process; (ii) the date on which the process came into effect; (iii) how many residential care homes have used it; and (iv) how many incidents of missing children have been recorded. (AQW 5715/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the Children's Homes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 that came into operation on the 1 April 2005 all Trusts have a statutory duty to draw up and record in writing procedures to be followed when any child accommodated in a children's home is absent without permission. These procedures have to be drawn to the attention of children and staff in the children's home.

Under the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 which came into operation on 4 November 1996 all Trusts are required to keep in their records of the placement any notifications by the foster carer of any serious occurrence affecting a child which includes absence without permission.

The information for part (iii) and (iv) is not collected centrally, and if available, could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at the Tyrone County Hospital is to remain as a permanent 24 hour, seven days a week, service. (AQW 5726/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm that the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital will continue to function as a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

The Trust advises that projected demand for the service indicates that 6 emergency nurse practitioners, supported by staff nurses and nursing auxiliaries, will be required to provide a doctor led 24/7 service at the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how the Tyrone County Hospital deals with patients who require a scan after 5pm. (AQW 5727/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the new model of care, only those patients who are medically stable will be treated at Tyrone County Hospital. Such patients will not require access to out-of-hours CT scanning.

Where patients are assessed as not requiring acute medical treatment, but where CT scanning would contribute to their diagnosis, they will be given an appointment during normal working hours.

The Trust plans to increase the provision of diagnostics at TCH, including CT scanning, with the additional service provided by appointment during the normal working day. It would not be the best use of resources to provide a CT scanning service after 5 pm when there would be no demand, given the new model of care.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment as to whether a reduction in CT scanning services at the Tyrone County Hospital from 24 hours to 9am-5pm is the most efficient means of delivery of the service. (AQW 5728/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under the new model of care, only those patients who are medically stable will be treated at Tyrone County Hospital. Such patients will not require access to out-of-hours CT scanning.

Where patients are assessed as not requiring acute medical treatment, but where CT scanning would contribute to their diagnosis, they will be given an appointment during normal working hours.

The Trust plans to increase the provision of diagnostics at TCH, including CT scanning, with the additional service provided by appointment during the normal working day. It would not be the best use of resources to provide a CT scanning service after 5 pm when there would be no demand, given the new model of care.

Tyrone County Hospital

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many emergency nurse practitioners are required to run the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre safely at the Tyrone County Hospital on a 24/7 basis. (AQW 5729/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm that the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre at Tyrone County Hospital will continue to function as a 24 hour, seven days a week service.

The Trust advises that projected demand for the service indicates that 6 emergency nurse practitioners, supported by staff nurses and nursing auxiliaries, will be required to provide a doctor led 24/7 service at the Urgent Care and Treatment Centre.

George Best Belfast City Airport

Mr R Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to planning application Z/2008/0306/F to extend the runway at George Best Belfast City Airport, whether there has been correspondence between Planning Service and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board asking the Board to comment on the application, and if so, when. (AQW 5782/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Eastern Health and Social Services Board were invited to comment on the planning application for the proposed runway extension at George Best Belfast City Airport in a letter from Planning Service dated 2 February 2009.

This invitation arose following correspondence from the Board to the Planning Service in January 2009 which highlighted that the Board had not received any information or correspondence in relation to this application. The Board, as the responsible Health Authority for the area, expects to be consulted, particularly as this is a major application which prompts serious questions in regard to public health and public safety.

Carers' Review

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 4687/09, if he will be more specific than 'in the near future'. (AQW 5835/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have asked for a report on the joint review to be provided before Easter.

Mental-Health Provision

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to increase resources for mental health provision in the next financial year. (AQO 2191/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Resources for mental health provision in 2009/2010 will increase by £14.6m. Over the CSR period investment in Mental Health Services will increase by £54.4m (£27m recurrently). This means by 2010/11, expenditure on mental health will have risen by 12%.

This funding, which is part of the extra money I fought hard to secure during the Budget negotiations, is further evidence of my commitment to improving services in this area.

Capital Budget Programme

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an assessment of his capital budget programme. (AQO 2192/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The outcome of the CSR for my Department will allow me to progress a number of important capital projects but there are many more much-needed projects which, due to lack of funding, cannot proceed right across primary & community care, hospitals and emergency services.

Despite these constraints, I am pressing ahead to ensure that almost £700m of capital funding is being invested during the CSR to deliver first class facilities across the service, such as:

- Completion of a new state of the art £64m Enhanced Local Hospital in Downpatrick;
- Completion of the £100m first phase of the Ulster Hospital;
- Completion of a new £14m Regional Adolescent Psychiatric Unit and Family Centre at Forster Green;
- Completion of Health and Care Centres at Castlereagh, Shankill, Beechall and Portadown;
- Continuing the £143m development of the new Critical Care Building at the Royal Victoria Hospital

Loch Cuan Residential Home

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make a decision on Loch Cuan Residential Home and what progress has been made on the consultation with residents and their families. (AQO 2193/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust's consultation period ended on 12th February, and the Trust is currently giving consideration to all the views raised in the consultation including, of course, those raised by residents and their families. It is important that the Trust is given sufficient time to give these views the consideration they deserve before reaching its decision. If it wishes to proceed with

closure, the final decision will be mine. However, we are still some way off that point and it is not therefore possible at this stage to say when, or if, I will have to make a final decision on the future of Loch Cuan.

Palliative/Hospice Care for Children

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what representations he has received on the funding of children's palliative care and children's hospice care. (AQO 2194/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am fully committed to ensuring that the full range of services are available to children with palliative care needs and I have received a number of representations on this issue.

I recently announced additional funding to improve community support for children with complex needs. This includes £2.4m for respite care, including hospice provision, and an increase of 30 nurses in the community children's nursing service which provides the bulk of palliative care for children.

In addition, from April 2008, the Children's Hospice has received an annual allocation of £200k to develop outreach services. Parents, families, and voluntary sector organisations such as MacMillan, Clic Sargent and the NI Children's Cancer Fund all work together with the statutory sector to provide support and care for children with life-limiting illnesses. Palliative care provided in the home can often be the most appropriate response in meeting the needs of these children.

I believe that this collaborative approach, which ensures that children and their families receive high quality care in the setting most appropriate to their individual needs, should continue.

Efficiency Savings

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the efficiency savings proposals for Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQO 2195/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Targets were imposed on all Departments at the same rate and there was no special dispensation made for health - despite inherent underfunding of £600m. The efficiencies are a major challenge for me but must be achieved if I am to deliver my service development and maintain services.

I am still waiting for consultation and internal Trust processes to complete before I can comment on the key proposals.

NIO Meetings

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any recent meetings he has held with the NIO and what issues were addressed at these meetings. (AQO 2196/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am in regular contact with the NIO on various issues of common interest, including the Fire and Rescue Service; emergency planning arrangements; sexual violence; prison health; child protection; domestic violence; firework safety; Coroners; and the protection of healthcare workers.

Births by Caesarian Section

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps he is taking to reduce the number of births by caesarian section. (AQO 2198/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision to deliver a woman by Caesarean Section either electively or as an emergency is based on the clinical judgement of an obstetrician who takes account of the medical condition and circumstances of both mother and infant.

My Department has undertaken several initiatives to ensure all caesarean sections are carried out appropriately. Specifically I have asked Trusts to: implement recommendations from the Confidential Enquiry into Maternal

and Child Health report “Saving Mothers Lives”, and those recommendations arising from reviews of maternal deaths. During 2008 my Department also endorsed NICE guidance in relation to both Antenatal and Intrapartum care.

Health Outcomes: Reducing Inequalities

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in reducing inequalities in health outcomes, particularly in relation to Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQO 2199/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is increasingly recognised that health inequalities are the product of a wide range of social, economic and health related issues.

Although there have been some relative and welcome improvements across a number of indicators (for example, teenage births, infant mortality, admission rates to hospital, cancer incidence and death rates), in many areas the health inequality gaps remain large. In general terms the gap between deprived areas and the NI average has remained fairly consistent over recent years.

A sub-regional analysis at Trust area level is underway and should be published at the end of the year.

Further work to tackle the issue of Health Inequalities will be a key priority for the new Public Health Agency which will be launched on 1st April 2009.

Service Developments

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what new service developments he has announced since May 2007.

(AQO 2200/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have announced the following service developments since May 2007:

- Exclusion of cleaning services from the scope of PFI project procurements in health and social care services;
- Car parking guidance for Trusts;
- Policy on Recruitment of doctors in training;
- Oral Health Strategy for NI;
- Local Decontamination Policy for General Practice Dentists;
- School Dental Screening;
- Student Nursing Bursaries;
- Nursing care standards for patient food in hospitals;
- Clinical supervision of nurses;
- Nursing response to children with complex physical healthcare needs;
- Improving cleanliness in hospitals and reducing healthcare acquired infections, including specific hand hygiene, hospital visiting and regional dress strategies;
- Improved workforce productivity;
- Equality, Good Relations and human rights strategy and action plan;
- The future of Pathology Services in NI;
- Transport Strategy for Health & Social Care Services in NI;
- Single Rooms Policy;
- Improving Stroke services in NI and investment of £14m;
- Immunisation against papilloma virus which causes cervical cancer;
- Introduction of bowel cancer screening;
- Introduction of screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm;
- Screening of newborns for Medium Chain Acetyl Co A Dehydrogenase Deficiency;
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups;
- Families Matter – supporting families in NI;

- Sexual Violence;
- Care Standards for Nursing & Residential Care homes;
- Review of Public Administration – Reform of Health & Social Care Services;
- New hospital for South West to be built near Enniskillen;
- Enhanced local hospital to be built at Omagh;
- Zero Tolerance to attacks on Health & Social Care staff;
- Nurses pay;
- Junior Doctors Recruitment;
- Recruitment of learning disability nurses;
- Suicide Prevention – introduction of help line;
- Cardiovascular Framework and investment of £12m;
- All Island Mental Health Promotion;
- Dental Contract;
- Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Service;
- Diabetic Retinopathy Screening;
- Tobacco: Age of Sale;
- Regional drugs manufacturing facility;
- Investment of £3.4m in learning disability services;
- Tool for assessing the health and social care needs of older people;
- Investment of £9m to improve community support for children with complex needs;
- Code of Practice to protect service user confidentiality;
- Investment in Paediatric Neurology Services;
- Guidance on risk assessment and management in adult mental health services;
- Regional Parenting Helpline;
- Investment of £5m to improve services for respiratory disease;
- Top up option for additional drugs;
- Abolition of prescription charges;
- Introduction of community first responder schemes;
- Community pharmacy minor ailment service;
- Investment of approx £63m over three years to improve health and social care services and facilities in the Southern Trust area;
- Investment of £58m over three years to improve health and social care services and facilities in the Western Trust area;
- Establishment of personality disorder services;
- Investment of approx £117m over three years to improve health and social care services and facilities in the South Eastern Trust area;
- Revised Northern Ireland Pandemic Flu health plan;
- Investment of approx £29m over three years to improve health and social care services and facilities in the Northern Trust area;
- Investment of approx £180m over three years to improve health and social care services and facilities in the Belfast Trust area;
- Standards to improve patient care;
- Regional Action Plan to tackle ‘Hidden Harm’;
- Investment of £55m over three years for additional information technology across health and social care;
- Investment of £800,000 in publicly funded fertility services;
- Introduction of online infection control manual;
- Investment of approx £26m over three years in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service;

- Investment of £17m over the next three years in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service;
- Investment of £500,000 in the maternity unit at Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry;
- 24/7 nursing cover for Rathlin Island;
- Investment of over £3m in emergency services in Fermanagh and Tyrone;
- Investment of £190m at the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald; and
- Five Year Regional Strategy for tackling sexual violence and abuse.

Letters to Local Newspapers

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the letters he has submitted to the editorial pages of local weekly newspapers in his capacity as Minister in 2009. (AQO 2201/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have submitted four letters to the editorial pages of a range of local weekly papers.

Tobacco Control

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of his plans for future tobacco control. (AQO 2202/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I believe that my plans for tobacco control, which include banning the display of tobacco products at point of sale and introducing controls on the sale of tobacco from vending machines, will prove effective in helping to reduce the appeal and uptake of smoking by our children and young people.

In addition, my Department's Tobacco Action Plan 2003-2008 is being reviewed and will be updated to reflect current and emerging priorities. The use of public information campaigns and the further development of smoking cessation services are also key to achieving our long term goal of a tobacco free society.

Cardiac Deaths in Young People

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the increasing number of sudden cardiac deaths in young people. (AQO 2203/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not aware of any increase in the number of sudden cardiac deaths in young people in Northern Ireland. Reliable figures on sudden cardiac death are difficult to quantify.

More than twenty different conditions have been identified as causes of sudden cardiac death in young people. There is no one specific test which can identify all those at risk of the different causes of sudden cardiac death and multiple cardiac investigations are often required to establish accurate diagnosis. Based on estimates from other countries, there are probably about ten sudden unexpected cardiac deaths from a range of different causes in young people in Northern Ireland every year.

A national UK Cardiac Pathology Network (UKCPN) was launched in November 2008. It has established a database which aims to provide improved data on the frequency of sudden cardiac death as well as important demographic information. The database will also provide information on geographic variation in the uptake of specialist cardiac pathology services.

Cocaine: Dangers

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to raise awareness of the dangers of cocaine given the increase of its availability. (AQO 2204/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Cocaine use is an issue my Department takes very seriously. Through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs, relevant literature and education/information programmes currently available to young people, young adults, parents and professionals at both the

regional and local level contains information on cocaine, particularly highlighting the risks associated with its use. In addition, schools address cocaine use as part of the substance misuse programme of their preparing for life education courses.

My Department has recently commissioned two research projects looking at cocaine use and users, in terms of prevalence and attitudes. Once finalised these projects will inform decisions in relation to the need for a targeted regional cocaine public information campaign, and how this should be developed.

Pregnancy: Termination Guidelines

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what new recommendations he will make in his guidelines on the termination of pregnancy. (AQO 2205/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy has been produced to explain the existing law relating to the termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland, and explains how it relates to clinical practice. It does not make any new recommendations.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Northern Ireland Water

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many pipe blockages cleared by Northern Ireland Water were attributed to inappropriate disposal of cooking fat, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4066/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that in many cases the equipment used to break up material or vacuum tanks used to clear the sewer make it difficult to identify the material that had caused a sewer blockage. For this reason, records of the specific causes of blockages are not maintained and NIW is unable to provide the breakdown sought.

Road Safety at Lislagan Primary School

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service will consider improving road safety at Lislagan Primary School in Ballymoney, and working with other agencies to improve parking facilities for parents. (AQW 4953/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a meeting took place recently, at Lislagan Primary School, to discuss road safety concerns. The meeting was attended by councillors, parents, the principal, the PSNI and Roads Service Officials.

One of the road safety issues identified, related to cars parking near the junction of Lislagan Road and Finvoy Road, and the congestion this practice sometimes causes. This in turn, creates difficulties for vehicles turning into Lislagan Road from the Finvoy Road. I understand that, in order to help relieve the congestion, Roads Service has now provided road markings to prohibit parking at this location.

With regard to improving parking facilities for parents at the school, the provision of additional parking at the school is a matter for the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) to take the lead on. Roads Service will continue to work with other agencies, including the NEELB, to address road safety issues that fall within its responsibility.

Translink

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many instances of bullying on Translink buses in the Ballymena area have been reported to Translink, in each of the last four years. (AQW 5152/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has confirmed that, within the area served by the Ballymena bus depot, the following instances of bullying have been reported:-

2005	2006	2007	2008
1 complaint	1 complaint	2 complaints	3 complaints

Roads Maintenance

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development in relation to roads maintenance in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas (i) how much his Department has spent in each of the last three years; and (ii) how many miles of road, by class, are in the constituencies. (AQW 5220/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service approximate spend on roads maintenance, in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas in each of the last three years, are set out in the table below.

	2007/08 £M	2006/07 £M	2005/06 £M
Craigavon Borough Council	5.5	5.2	5.3
Banbridge District Council	4.0	3.9	4.0

Details of road mileage, by class, in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas are set out in the table below.

	Motorway km	A Class km	B Class km	C Class km	Unclassified km
Craigavon Borough Council	23	61	101	135	504
Banbridge District Council	-	77	96	228	621

Rathgael Road in Bangor

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to report on the designation of the Rathgael Road in Bangor. (AQW 5294/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that the C368 Rathgael Road in Bangor, is classed as a C class road and under the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, is designated as a local distributor road.

Rathgael Road in Bangor

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) nature; and (ii) financial value of each improvement made by the Roads Service to the Rathgael Road in Bangor, over the last ten years. (AQW 5295/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Departments Roads Service has carried out a number of improvements to the Rathgael Road, Bangor over the last ten years. The table below sets out the nature of the works and the approximate value of each.

Date	Nature of the works	Cost (approx)
2000/01	Rathgael Road near Ferngrove - provision of hard standing area at bus stop.	£600
2001/02	Rathgael Road (at Nos. 158 – 160) – provision of footway link.	£11,000
2002/03	Rathgael Road / Clandeboye Road junction – signalisation and junction improvement, incorporating right-turn facilities and controlled pedestrian phases.	£85,000

Date	Nature of the works	Cost (approx)
2002/03	Rathgael Road – exiting 6 metre street lighting columns upgraded to 8 metre columns, with higher wattage lamps and improved lighting output.	£70,000
2003/04	Rathgael Road / Lord Wardens Road junction – provision of right turn pocket and pedestrian island.	£106,000
2004/05	Rathgael Road between Birch Drive and Clandeboye Road - minor improvements to kerb alignment.	£1,000
2005/06	Rathgael Road (EuroSpar to Lord Wardens Grange) – localised vertical realignment and construction of 28m of new footway.	£20,000
2006/07	Rathgael Road at Lord Wardens Road - alteration to kerb alignment at junction.	£4,000
Total		£297,600

In addition, I am advised that a number of carriageway and footway resurfacing schemes have been carried out on the Rathgael Road at a total estimated cost of £210k. These include:-

- 1998/99 – A2 Belfast Road to Clandeboye Road – carriageway resurfacing;
- 2001/02 – The Brambles to Henalta Wood – carriageway & footway resurfacing;
- 2002/03 – Rathgael Road / Clandeboye Road Junction – carriageway resurfacing;
- 2002/03 – Henalta Wood to Brook Lane – carriageway & footway resurfacing; and
- 2005/06 – Clandeboye Road to The Brambles – carriageway & footway resurfacing.

Rathgael Road in Bangor

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to report on the views of the Roads Service about the proposed residential development on the former NIO lands on the Rathgael Road in Bangor. (AQW 5296/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, as part of the planning process, it is currently considering an application for increased residential development on the former site of the Juvenile Correction Centre on the Rathgael Road, Bangor. The application also includes retail units.

Roads Service has raised a number of concerns in relation to the transportation impact of the development and is currently awaiting additional supporting information from the applicant.

Car Owners

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the legal position of car owners who want to park outside their own homes when it is adjacent to a marked bicycle lane. (AQW 5298/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are two types of cycle lane, a mandatory (marked by a solid white line) and advisory (marked by a broken white line) cycle lane. Subject to certain exceptions, it is an offence for a person to cause or permit any vehicle, other than a cycle, to wait in a mandatory cycle lane. The exceptions include:-

- vehicles being used in the services of the Department in pursuance of statutory powers or duties;
- vehicles being used in connection with any telegraphic line, or with the supply of electricity or gas, within the cycle lane or an area accessible only from the cycle lane;
- vehicles being used in an emergency by a medical practitioner, or for police, military, fire brigade or ambulance purposes; and
- vehicles waiting at the direction of, or with the permission of a police officer.

In the case of an advisory cycle lane, vehicles may park, unless waiting restrictions apply to that side of the road. However, I would encourage motorists not to park in an advisory cycle lane unless it is unavoidable.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to deal with the problem that some domestic customers have with water pressure. (AQW 5339/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it aims to supply water to domestic customers at a pressure of at least 15 metres head at the boundary of their property. This is the recognised water industry minimum standard. If a domestic customer believes the water pressure serving his/her property is too low, NIW will carry out an investigation, free of charge, and inform the customer of the outcome and what solutions may be possible.

Water Supplies

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what notice is given to domestic customers who have their water supply cut off as a result of work being carried out. (AQW 5342/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, in accordance with its Customer Charter, it aims to give domestic customers at least 48 hours notice in writing of plans to turn off or limit their water supply for more than 4 hours.

Obviously advance notice cannot be given if the water supply is disrupted by an unexpected event such as a burst water main. In such circumstances the priority is to restore the water supply as quickly as possible and NIW aims to achieve this within 12 hours of being notified of the problem. Where practicable, NIW will inform the residents affected of the work being carried out and the reason it is required.

NIW's Customer Charter can be accessed on its website at: <http://www.niwater.com/codesofpractice.asp>

Northern Ireland Water

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the monitoring his Department carries out on the efficiency of Northern Ireland Water's maintenance work. (AQW 5343/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Northern Ireland Water's (NIW) overall performance is monitored through Key Performance Indicators (KPI'S) set out in its Strategic Business Plan. This includes targets on overall efficiency, interruptions to supply and water mains leakage. My Department monitors NIW's performance on these targets through quarterly meetings with the Company. There is no specific KPI relating to the efficiency of maintenance work.

NIW, like other utilities, has a statutory right to excavate roads and footpaths for the installation and maintenance of their equipment. Under the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Roads Service regulates utility reinstatements to ensure they meet statutory quality requirements.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Environment Agency monitor the quality of drinking water and wastewater discharges. Both bodies produce annual reports. Inefficient maintenance work would have an indirect impact on these areas.

The Utility Regulator monitors NIW's performance against its business plan objectives through the review of an Annual Information Return from the Company. The results of the Utility Regulator's analysis are published annually in a Cost and Performance Report.

Sewerage System in Killyleagh

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 1280/09, why (i) an investigation of; and (ii) work on, the sewerage system in Killyleagh has not been fulfilled. (AQW 5346/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the sewerage network in Killyleagh is one of a programme of 14 where initial scoping studies will determine whether a full scale Drainage Area Study is carried out. This scoping study work is expected to be completed by the end of March 2009. If a full Drainage Area Study is required any further capital improvement work identified would be scheduled for commencement thereafter subject to availability of funding.

Tullynagardy Road in Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he is taking to have the (i) pot holes filled; and (ii) resurfacing completed on the Tullynagardy Road in Newtownards. (AQW 5348/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that repairs have recently been carried out on the Tullynagardy Road, Newtownards, following the identification of a small number of potholes during a recent inspection of road.

You will appreciate that the funding available to Roads Service for structural maintenance is limited and consequently the resources available for such works are allocated, to the four Roads Service Divisions, on a needs-based priority approach. Unfortunately, there are no plans, at present, to carry out major resurfacing of the Tullynagardy Road.

However, I can advise that surfacing will be laid on sections of the verge, to enable vehicles to pass on this narrow road.

Ballycastle to Rathlin Ferry

Mr D Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development what time the last ferry sailed from Ballycastle to Rathlin on Mondays and Fridays in (i) September; (ii) October; and (iii) November, in 2007 and 2008. (AQW 5364/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The last scheduled ferry sailing on Mondays and Fridays from Ballycastle to Rathlin was at 18.30 hours during September 2008 and at 16.30 hours during October and November 2008. The corresponding sailings in 2007 were at 18.30 hours during September and at 16.00 hours on Mondays and 16.30 hours on Fridays during October and November.

School Bus Routes

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what criteria is used to ascertain if school bus runs are gritted. (AQW 5392/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The criteria for salting school bus routes were considered in the review of my Department's winter service policy and procedures in 2001.

- The criteria for inclusion of roads in the salting schedule are 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 and carrying more than 1,000 vehicles per day shall be considered. The special difficulties considered include:-
 - severity, frequency, and extent of gradients;
 - frequency of bends;
 - height above sea level;
 - railway level crossings;
 - abnormally high junction frequencies.

Note, that within this category consideration will be given to the availability of alternative, or parallel routes, which are included in the salting schedule. Where such routes exist, the routes being considered under this criterion may not be salted; and

- small settlements, containing 100 dwellings or more, shall have a salted link to the nearest part of the existing salted network.

In addition to the above criteria, Roads Service provides salt bins or grit piles for public use, on a self help basis, on more lightly trafficked routes.

One of the key outcomes of the 2001 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 salting 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 between and extra £4.5-£7.0 million 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. For example, a 40 seat bus is now counted as 40 vehicles for the purpose identifying qualifying routes.

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.

Footway Between Ballymena and Cullybackey

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what work has been done on constructing a footway between Woodtown Road, Ballymena and Cullybackey; and what plans are there to complete this work. (AQW 5411/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, during the last two financial years, 2007/08 to 2008/09, approximately 1.15 km of 2.0 metre wide asphalt footway has been constructed between the Woodtown Road, Ballymena and Cullybackey.

Detailed design of the remaining 0.8 km of footway required, to connect to the existing footway network in Cullybackey, is ongoing. The provision of this remaining link is currently included in the draft works programme for the 2010/11 financial year. However, this will be subject to the successful acquisition of land, and the availability of funding at that time.

School Bus Routes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many school bus routes in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area are not gritted during severe winter weather. (AQW 5414/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads 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.

Repairs to Water and Sewerage Infrastructure

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Regional Development what arrangements and protocols are applied by his Department and its agencies in relation to dealing with repairs to water and sewerage infrastructure and roads and footpaths. (AQW 5432/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that utilities, including Northern Ireland Water (NIW), have a statutory right to open roads and footpaths for the purpose of installing and maintaining their equipment.

My Department's Roads Service has no control over the number of road and footpath openings, but has powers, under the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, to regulate the process. Roads Service carries out regular inspections of utility reinstatements, to ensure that these works are completed in accordance with the technical requirements, set out in the statutory reinstatement Code of Practice, "Specification for the Reinstatement of Openings in Roads". The Code of Practice prescribes the materials to be used and the standards of workmanship to be observed in reinstatements in roads and footways.

With regard to repairs to water and sewerage infrastructure, NIW has advised that response times for a range of services are set out in their Customer Charter which can be viewed on NIW's website at http://www.niwater.com/siteFiles/resources/pdf/COP/CCharter_v11.pdf. The Customer Charter sets out the standards of service that customers can expect and includes target timescales for dealing with repairs. These details are also available in NIW's published Codes of Practice.

Asbestos Pipes

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the water system in East Antrim is in the form of asbestos pipes and when they will be replaced. (AQW 5435/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are approximately 860 kilometres of water mains in the East Antrim area of which 43 kilometres (approximately 5%) are asbestos cement pipes.

It is important to note that asbestos cement pipes are fully approved for use within Britain and here in the North and they are only replaced if there is a specific problem at a location, for example where there is insufficient hydraulic capacity or the structural condition of the pipework makes it susceptible to frequent bursts. NIW is progressively replacing asbestos cement pipework through its Mains Rehabilitation Programme. In the period from July 2004 to December 2008, almost 70 km of asbestos cement pipe was replaced and it is envisaged that a further 40 km will be replaced in 2009 based on the same criteria.

NIW continuously assesses the condition and performance of asbestos cement mains within the Watermains Rehabilitation Programme and during daily operational activity.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic calming measures exist in East Antrim. (AQW 5437/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 31 traffic calming schemes, and seven school travel and safety projects, in East Antrim.

School Bus Routes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many school bus routes; (ii) and how many miles in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area were gritted during the severe winter weather.

(AQW 5469/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to my reply to his recent Assembly Question AQW 5414/09.

School Buses

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many accidents involving school buses occurred in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area, over the period of severe winter weather.

(AQW 5470/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that in the South Eastern Area there were no accidents directly attributable to the severe weather conditions during the period 30 January to 14 February involving dedicated school service vehicles.

The Minister of Education has informed me that she has been advised by the Chief Executive of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that there was one accident involving an Education and Library Board bus.

Proposed Footbridge on Main Street, Beragh

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress and estimated completion date of the proposed footbridge on Main Street, Beragh, County Tyrone.

(AQW 5487/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that negotiations with landowners, affected by the planned footbridge, are at an advanced stage. Subject to the successful completion of this process, the scheme will be delivered in the 2009/10 financial year.

Road Projects

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all road projects (i) for this year and (ii) planned for next year, and the value of the each investment.

(AQW 5490/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service had nine major road schemes, under construction during this financial year, 2008/2009. In the 2009/2010 financial year Roads Service intends to commence a further five schemes, subject to satisfactory completion of the procurement process and availability of finance through the normal budgetary system. The tables below provide the detail requested on these schemes.

Major Road Schemes – Under Construction during 2008/2009			
Scheme	Start Date	Finish Date	Estimated Value £m
M1/Westlink upgrade - DBFO Package 1	2006	March 09	104
M2 Widening (Sandyknowes to Greencastle) - DBFO Package 1	2007	On-going	19.5
A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue - DBFO Package 2	2007	On going	152
A1 Junction Improvements - DBFO Package 2	2007	On-going	30
A4/A5 Improvements (A4 Annaghilla and A5 Tullyvar) - DBFO Package 2	2008	On-going	18
A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley - DBFO Package	2008	On-going	115
A4 Henry Street/Sligo Road, Enniskillen	2008	2008	1.7
A20 Newtownards Frederick Street Link	2008	2008	2.4
A20 Newtownards Southern Distributor	2008	On-going	14

Major Road Schemes – Planned to Commence 2009/2010	
Scheme	Estimated Value £m
A26/M2 Ballee Road East, Ballymena	12
A2 Broadbridge	46
A29 Carland Bridge Improvement	5
A32 Cherrymount Link	11
Cairnshill Park and Ride	10

With regard to the number of minor works and maintenance works, Roads Service can only provide overall spend figures because of the micro nature of some of the works, for example, pothole repairs, traffic sign repairs, etc. I can advise that Roads Service intends to spend some £23 million in 2008/2009 and £20 million in 2009/2010. This includes works such as minor improvements, collision remedial schemes, traffic calming, pedestrian and bus measures, etc. The estimated spend on minor bridge strengthening in 2008/2009 is £5 million and £4 million in 2009/2010.

Roads Service's expenditure on maintenance activities (including in-house contractor costs) in 2008/2009, will be in the region of £115 million and estimated to be some £125.7 million in 2009/2010. This includes works such as resurfacing, reconstruction, surface dressing, patching, as well as other routine maintenance activity, eg, winter service, grass cutting, gully emptying, etc.

Third Citybound Lane of the M2

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm (i) the specific date that the third citybound lane of the M2 will be open to traffic, (ii) the official completion date of the project; and (iii) the date of the official opening ceremony. (AQW 5492/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the M2 Improvements Scheme is presently programmed to be substantially complete by April this year, and that the third lane of the citybound carriageway of the M2, between Sandyknowes and Greencastle junctions, is expected to be opened to traffic before this date. The official contract completion date is expected to be 20 August 2009. A date has not yet been set for the official opening ceremony.

Expansion of the M2

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the future expansion of the M2 to four lanes, city and country bound; and if there would be any land or geographical constraints that would cause problems with this proposal. (AQW 5493/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The Regional Development Strategy 2025, identified the M2 as one of the main Key Transport Corridors, connecting the north and north-west with Belfast. It also provides access to Belfast International Airport and the Port of Larne.

The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) identified the delivery of major capacity enhancement at key locations on the strategic road network in the form of road widening and junction improvements to address 'bottlenecks'.

On the M2, the BMTP proposed the widening of the southbound carriageway from Sandyknowes junction to the M2/M5 junction at Greencastle. This section of the M2 carries around 62,000 vehicles per day in both directions. When the works are completed, this three lane urban motorway will provide a flow capacity that is approximately double the present traffic volume.

My Department has no plans in the foreseeable future for any further widening of the M2 motorway to four lanes, and therefore, will not be examining the land or geographical constraints concerning further expansion, at this time.

New Storm Drain in Main Street, Crumlin

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm the start and finish date of the project to lay a new storm drain in Main Street, Crumlin, and the surrounding area, and to detail how much this project will cost. (AQW 5495/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is providing a requisitioned sewer at Main Street, Crumlin for a proposed supermarket development and the requisitioner is required to pay the reasonable costs of providing the sewer as determined in accordance with Northern Ireland Water's charges scheme. It is estimated that work on the sewer will commence around May/June 2009 provided the reasonable costs have been paid in advance. The work will take four months to complete at a total cost of almost £161,000.

Waste Water Treatment Works

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all Waste Water Treatment Works projects (i) for this year and (ii) planned for next year, and the value of the each investment. (AQW 5501/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) projects detailed in the tables below are ongoing during the 2008/09 financial year and planned for 2009/10.

TABLE 1

Projects Ongoing During 2008/09	
Project Name	Project Total (£000s)
Darragh Cross WwTW	930
Killen WwTW	1,335
Park WwTW	2,094
Lower Ballinderry WwTW	1,444
Poundburn WwTW	805
Annahilt WwTW	5,052
Cloughy WwTW Interim Solution	1,740
Ballywalter WwTW Interim Solution	2,311
Ballyhalbert WwTW Interim Solution	4,173
Seahill WwTW	7,429
Downpatrick WwTW	11,086
Small WwTWs Priority Upgrades	10,911
Newry WWTW Aeration upgrade	473
Coalisland WwTW	8,036
Moygashel WwTW	3,572
Benburb/Milltown - RBC Installations West & South	3,645
Castlecaulfield WwTW	3,375
Mountfield WwTW	392
Enniskillen WwTW	13,819
Derrylin WwTW	3,323
Dromore WwTW	5,659

Projects Ongoing During 2008/09	
Project Name	Project Total (£000s)
Gilford WwTW	1,942
Crossmaglen WwTW	1,962
Castlewellan WwTW	5,612
Warrenpoint WwTW	2,944
Milltown, Antrim WwTW	22,356
Lisbarnet WwTW	4,447
Clough WwTW	3,536
Annahilt WwTW	5,052
Dromara WwTW	3,190
Saintfield WwTW	5,347
Draperstown WwTW	3,387
Bushmills + Portballintrae WwTW	8,033
Seahill WwTW	7,429
Portaferry WwTW	5,920
Limavady WwTW	6,785
Hamiltonsbawn WwTW	4,405
Hilltown WwTW	1,519
Cullaville WwTW	980
Belleeks WwTW	647
Newtownbreda, Dunmurry, New Holland WWTWs - Nutrient Removal	708
Magherafelt WwTW	5,347
Edenderry WwTW	511
	193,663

TABLE 2

Projects Planned For 2009/10	
Project Name	Project Total (£000s)
Donnybrewer WwTW	1,521
Benone Area Sewerage	7,301
Feeny WwTW	1,383
Moneymore STW Imps	1,845
Maghera WwTW	2,889
Coagh WwTW Improvements	1,715
Martinstown WwTW	1,756
Cargan WwTW	1,319
Cloughmills WwTW	1,193
Ballybogey WwTW	683
Newtownbreda WwTW	11,944

Projects Planned For 2009/10	
Project Name	Project Total (£000s)
Ballygowan WwTW	3,264
Dunmurry WwTW Modifications	8,775
Hook's Corner WwTW	1,260
Stewartstown WwTW Improvements	1,773
Lougheries WwTW	338
Parkgate WwTW Rationalization	937
Aghnaloo WwTW	3,388
Ballymonie WwTW	1,569
Lurganare WwTW	940
Toome (Creagh) Sewerage Scheme	8,584
Dungiven WwTW	3,555
Ardglass WwTW	5,946
Bessbrook/Newry WwTW	8,927
Strangford WwTW	3,089
Lawrencetown WwTW Upgrade	884
Mullaghboy WwTW	961
Portavogie WwTW Interim Solution	1,899
Whitehead, Ballystruder & Ballycarry Rationalisation	8,351
Ballyhalbert WwTW Interim Solution	4,173
	102,162

Royal National Institute for the Blind

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development how many meetings he has had with the Royal National Institute for the Blind; and what the outcomes of the meetings were. (AQW 5564/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have not met with the Royal Institute for the Blind (RNIB) since I took up my Ministerial post. However, an officer from my Department has recently been nominated to join the RNIB Vision Strategy Implementation Group to help progress the strategic objectives of the Vision Strategy.

Hibernia Street Car Park in Holywood

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development when a decision is expected by his Department on the issues surrounding Hibernia Street car park in Holywood. (AQW 5567/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that work on this matter is progressing and I will write to him, with a response, in due course.

Roads Service

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, following a meeting between an applicant and Planning Service, when revised plans were agreed in principle, why the Roads Service has taken over eight weeks to provide a formal response to Planning Service about social housing planning application ref U/2006/0560, and when Planning Service can expect a response. (AQW 5599/09)

Minister for Regional Development: In respect of planning application U/2006/0560/F, as part of the consultation exercise, my Department's Roads Service attended a meeting on 18 November 2008, with the agent/applicant, hosted by Planning Service, to discuss outstanding issues.

At the meeting a road alignment drawing was tabled in order to address road design issues. While this proposal was acceptable, in principle, it was noted that this alignment would impact on an existing, previously approved development, resulting in the displacement of car parking.

Roads Service received amended drawings for this application on 5 January 2009. An additional development application, to resolve the displaced car parking issues, was received on 6 January 2009. However, due to a significant backlog in development applications, and instruction from Planning Service to prioritise other planning applications, Roads Service has been unable to provide a formal response to Planning Service. Roads Service will endeavour to consider both applications and respond to Planning Service by 6 March 2009.

Roads Service

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development following a meeting between the applicant, and Planning Service, where revised plans were agreed, in principle, why has Roads Service taken over eight weeks to provide a formal response for social housing planning application ref U/2006/0560, and when can they expect a response. (AQW 5600/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I would refer the Member to my answer to Assembly Question AQW 5599/09.

Road Closures

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5263/09, if he will consider contacting local and major media outlets, when road closures are planned, to minimise the possibility of problems like the one that affected the M2 recently. (AQW 5604/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As I advised the Member, in my reply to his recent Assembly Questions AQW 5263/09 and AQW 5264/09, the planned closure of the M2 on Sunday 15 February was well advertised through the normal range of channels, which included:

- a press release to the media;
- an interview with a Roads Service official on Radio Ulster;
- Roads Service's website (Trafficwatchni);
- Roads Service's active email alert service; and
- Roads Service's Road Works Report.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the press release was sent to all media outlets throughout the North, including all television channels, radio stations and local and regional newspapers. It should be noted that, while Roads Service made every effort to inform as many people as possible of the planned closure of the M2, the decision to communicate the message rests solely with each media outlet.

As a consequence of the traffic jams on Sunday 15 February, Roads Service will review its notification procedures for all future motorway works. In the meantime, Roads Service will continue to notify all media outlets about planned major road closures.

Road Calming Schemes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road calming schemes will go ahead in the North Down area, in the next financial year. (AQW 5616/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, all proposals are required to be assessed, scored and prioritised within each Council area. Works programmes are then drawn up on an annual basis, which are published each year in the Autumn Roads Service Report to Councils. This programme may be subject to change, depending on the assessed priority of new requests for traffic calming.

In relation to 2009/10 financial year, I can advise that Roads Service proposes to provide the following traffic calming schemes in the North Down Borough Council area:

- Seahill Road, Holywood;
- Ballymacconnell Road South, Bangor;
- Skipperstone Road/Whitehill area, Bangor;
- Bryansburn Road / Brunswick Road, Bangor;
- Church Road, Holywood;
- Groomsport Road, Bangor;
- Croft Road, Holywood; and
- Abbey Ring, Holywood.

These schemes are subject to the successful conclusion of the public consultation and legislative processes.

Independent Travel

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken to promote independent travel on buses, trains and cycles by persons with learning disabilities. (AQW 5630/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Under the Accessible Transport Strategy my Department published a Travel Safe guide to promote independent travel for people with learning disabilities.

A total of 3,000 copies of the guide were distributed to a variety of groups including special educational need schools, day and resource centres, church groups, advisory organisations, health care providers and individuals.

My Department also commissioned its independent advisors (Imtac) to research how best to further promote travel on public transport for people with learning disabilities. In light of the Bamford Review we have asked Imtac to further gauge the impact of the Accessible Transport Strategy on people with learning difficulties and mental health service users.

Sligo to Enniskillen Roadway

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on improving the Sligo to Enniskillen roadway; and whether this matter was on the agenda of the recent North South Ministerial Council meeting. (AQW 5661/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The M1/A4, running from Belfast to the Border at Belcoo is identified as a Key Transport Corridor in the Regional Development Strategy 2025. Extensive works are currently in progress to upgrade this route between Dungannon and Augher. Over 20 km of dual carriageway are under construction between Dungannon and Ballygawley and a further 4 km of widened (2+1) single carriageway are being built between Ballygawley and Augher.

Furthermore, my Department's Investment Delivery Plan for roads (2008-18), published earlier this year, includes proposals for bypasses of Enniskillen and Fivemiletown, which will relieve congestion at these bottlenecks on this route and further enhance regional journey times.

These proposals reflect a phased development of this Key Transport Corridor in the North.

In the South, I understand that the National Roads Authority is carrying out route selection work, with a view to starting further schemes, as resources become available.

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.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many Northern Ireland companies; (ii) how many companies from outside Northern Ireland and the UK are to be involved in the Northern Ireland Railways track relay between Coleraine and Ballymena. (AQW 5706/09)

Minister for Regional Development: In total 12 companies will be involved in completing work on the track between Coleraine and Ballymena. Of these nine are local companies, two are from England and one is from France.

New Buses

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are any additional orders for new buses supplied by Wright bus in Ballymena, included in Translink's plans for next year. (AQW 5707/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As part of their current bus replacement programme Translink aim to purchase over 150 buses during the next two years. Wrights have been successful in previous tenders for bus supply with Translink. During 2008/09, 45 of the buses purchased were supplied by Wright Bus with Scania. The timing of future orders in relation to the 150 buses will be subject to budget planning and compliance with procurement rules.

Half Price Smart Pass Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the extension of the Half Price Smart Pass scheme to include return tickets. (AQW 5708/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that, from Monday 30 March 2009, holders of the Half Fare SmartPass will be able to purchase day return tickets on Northern Ireland Railways services.

Rural Transport Schemes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development for an assessment of rural transport schemes, and to detail what recommendations her Department has proposed in relation to child safety and the protection of drivers. (AQO 2263/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I consider the rural transport schemes, operated by 18 Rural Community Transport Partnerships and supported by the Rural Transport Fund to have been a great success. Since the inception of the Rural Transport Fund in 1998, the partnerships have been delivering lifeline services to rural dwellers with reduced mobility.

Although my Department has proposed no recommendations in relation to child safety and the protection of drivers, I can confirm that all drivers are Access NI checked and trained to MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme) standard. All the minibuses used to provide services are fitted with seatbelts. Each partnership also has a child protection policy.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Translation Services

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development what was the (i) total cost incurred by her Department; and (ii) hourly rate paid to interpreters, for translation services for residents from foreign countries, in each of the last two financial years. (AQW 5020/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The expenditure incurred by my Department in respect of translation services including interpreters for customers whose first language is not English in the last two financial years, is shown in the table below. The hourly rate paid to interpreters for translations services cannot

be provided as this information is commercially sensitive. The cost incurred includes my Department's agencies and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Year	Amount
2006/2007	£260,281
2007/2008	£137,963

Housing Executive Properties

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 boarded up and not being offered for occupation. (AQW 5115/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not record the number of properties boarded up. The table below details the properties at 31 January 2009 in the Newtownabbey II and Antrim District Office areas which are undergoing repairs or pending sale or demolition. Any properties undergoing major repairs or improvements will be brought back into use.

Housing Executive District Office	Undergoing Major Repairs / Improvements (Including Decants)	Pending Sale or Demolition
Newtownabbey 2	70	0
Antrim	95	79

Housing Executive Budget

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what strategies has she put in place to overcome the anticipated shortfall in the Housing Executive budget due to a fall in house and land sales; and how she will meet the targets in the Programme for Government to build 5,200 houses over the next three years. (AQW 5139/09)

Minister for Social Development: The anticipated shortfall in the housing budget is approximately £100 million in each of the next two years. I will be making every effort to secure additional resources and to make available resources stretch further. There is no target in the Programme for Government to build 5200 houses over the next three years.

Heating Installation

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she would consider reviewing the heating installed in houses with special adaptations to determine its adequacy for elderly and disabled people. (AQW 5157/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has no specific plans to review the heating installed in houses with special adaptations to determine its adequacy for elderly and disabled people. The Housing Executive's policy in relation to changes of heating outside normal improvement programmes is primarily concerned with providing a non-manual heating system for people with a disability who are unable or find it difficult to operate their heating system. If any tenant believes their heating system is inadequate they may apply to the Housing Executive for the heating system in their home to be changed to gas or oil heating.

Introductory Tenancies

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how many introductory tenancies were terminated on grounds of anti-social behaviour, in the South Antrim constituency, in 2008. (AQW 5167/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive did not terminate any introductory tenancies within the relevant District Office areas on the grounds of anti-social behaviour in 2008.

Housing Executive

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister for Social Development what role the Housing Executive had in the provision of a new garden at Divis Tower in memory of Brendan Hughes a former leader in the Provisional IRA; and how this relates to its commitment to 'a shared and better future'. (AQW 5299/09)

Minister for Social Development: The community garden, situated on Housing Executive owned land, was funded through the Greencare Phase 3 programme, which is managed through Groundwork NI and jointly funded by the Housing Executive and Belfast City Council as part of a series of projects throughout Belfast. The original application was for a community garden only for use by the residents of Divis Tower.

The decision to erect a plaque at the garden appears to have been taken by the residents after the completion of the works - without the agreement, involvement or knowledge of the Housing Executive. The Housing Executive understands that no funding was provided for the erection of a plaque through the Greencare Phase 3 programme.

Independent Living Fund

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to the Independent Living (Extension) Fund and the Independent Living (1993) Fund (i) how many people are receiving funding; (ii) how many are receiving more than £320; and (iii) how many staff have received training to process applications, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust areas. (AQW 5330/09)

Minister for Social Development: The latest available figures on Independent Living Fund awards and those awards in excess of £320 are contained in the following table:

Trust Name	Number receiving Funding	Award over £320
Belfast Health & Social Care	177	37
Eastern Health & Social Care	138	33
Northern Health & Social Care	164	19
Southern Health & Social Care	217	31
Western Health & Social Care	222	46
Total	918	166

In Northern Ireland there are 4 Independent Living Fund Assessors. They receive full training in the application process when they commence their work on a self-employed basis and attend further training each year in addition to receiving regular policy updates.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to increase the number of successful applications to the Warm Homes Scheme from Larne, in light of the high level of fuel poverty in this area as indicated by the Housing Executive Conditions Survey 2006. (AQW 5370/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Warm Homes Scheme has spent over £1.2million in the Larne area improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable people's homes. A new Warm Homes Scheme will be operational in the spring. The new Scheme managers will be required to target areas where need is greatest or where take up relative to need is low. The Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2006 will be of particular use in identifying areas in need.

Housing Repairs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what money she has allocated to the North Down area in the next financial year for routine housing repairs by the Housing Executive. (AQW 5420/09)

Minister for Social Development: Due to the review of the Housing Executive's programmes, caused by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget, this information is not yet available.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the significant rise in cases of damp and serious condensation in Housing Executive properties, over the past 3 years. (AQW 5449/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive is not in a position to clearly establish the reasons for the increase but do consider that the impact of extreme weather conditions and fuel costs has contributed to this.

Economic Downturn

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what the impact of the economic downturn has been on the delivery of her current policies and practices; and (ii) what changes to existing policies and practices have been made in relation to her Department's responsibilities to address the effects of the economic downturn. (AQW 5462/09)

Minister for Social Development:

- (i) At an operational level, my Department is managing the real impact of the economic downturn as it affects the normal course of business. This entails putting additional staff into frontline services to deal with increases in unemployment, reprioritising services to stay within reduced budgets and in particular, reprioritising services in Housing to stay within a budget greatly diminished by reduced receipts as a result of the collapse of house and land sales.
- (ii) I and my Executive colleagues remain committed to doing all that we can to protect local people and business from the worst effects of the economic downturn. Consequently, the economic situation is a standing item of Executive Business and the Executive collectively, is managing the overall response. In relation to Departmental practices in housing we have introduced a series of initiatives that try to make the budget stretch further. For example, forming procurement groups and requiring that more social houses are built on land that is already in public ownership.

While the current priorities of the Programme for Government remain valid, my Department remains committed to delivering the full Programme, although the difficult economic context makes this much more challenging. I am convinced that, as public expenditure is the only significant lever available to the Executive in addressing the economic downturn, it is essential that resources are directed to those areas that sustain employment and stimulate the economy.

Anti-social Behaviour Cases

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the anti-social behaviour cases (i) reported; and (ii) dealt with by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the North Down constituency, in each of the last three years. (AQW 5468/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available by Parliamentary Constituency. However, information regarding the anti-social behaviour cases reported to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's District Offices in the North Down and Ards District Council areas for 2006, 2007 and 2008 is as follows:-

	2006	2007	2008
Bangor	250	220	207
Newtownards	151	207	174

In relation to (ii) all cases were dealt with by the Housing Executive.

Housing Executive Homes

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been evicted from Housing Executive homes broken down by (i) month; and (ii) constituency, in each of the last 3 years, (AQW 5480/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive reports evictions on an annual basis and by District Office.

The following table gives the evictions in each of the last three years by Housing Executive District Office:-

NIHE District	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Belfast West	1	0	1
Belfast East	0	4	4
Belfast South	0	2	0
Belfast North	4	7	2
Belfast Shankill	6	3	4
(Area Totals)	11	16	11
Bangor	4	0	6
Newtownards	3	1	1
Castle'reagh	4	1	1
Lisburn	9	8	6
Down	3	4	0
(Area Totals)	23	14	14
Banbridge	0	2	0
Newry	0	0	0
Armagh	2	1	0
Lurgan/Brownlow	6	3	3
Portadown	5	2	1
Dungannon	3	1	5
Fermanagh	3	0	5
(Area Totals)	19	9	14
Ballymena	0	0	2
Antrim	0	0	1
Newtownabey	0	0	8
Carrickfergus	1	6	2
Larne	0	2	0
Ballycastle	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	2
(Area Totals)	1	8	15
Waterloo	0	0	0
Waterside	3	2	0

NIHE District	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Collon Terrace	1	0	3
Limavady	3	0	0
Magherafelt	3	1	0
Strabane	0	0	0
Omagh	0	1	5
Cookstown	0	0	2
(Area Totals)	10	4	10

Mahon Road Site in Portadown

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development what determining factors were used to identify the Mahon Road site in Portadown as a suitable location for the co-ownership scheme; and were any other sites examined for suitability in the Portadown area. (AQW 5484/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Mahon Road initiative in Portadown is not part of the co-ownership scheme but is a separate initiative known as Own A Home . This is a developer led scheme, instigated by Turkington Holdings, in partnership with Clanmil and South Ulster Housing Associations and Barclays Bank. The Department responded to this development by facilitating contact between these interested parties in order to support this initiative as an affordable route into home ownership.

Social Security Offices

Lord Browne asked the Minister for Social Development what the average waiting time is for a job interview at the Social Security Offices at the Holywood Arches, East Belfast (AQW 5534/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Jobs & Benefits service is jointly delivered by the Social Security Agency (SSA) and the Department for Employment Learning (DEL). A new claim interview comprises two parts:

A claim form check carried out by SSA staff

A work focused interview (WFI) carried out by DEL staff.

The current waiting time for a first interview for a new Jobseeker in Holywood Road Jobs & Benefits office (JBO) is 15 days.

Social Housing in Cushendall

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister for Social Development what the level of need is for social housing in Cushendall; and what plans she has to provide this housing. (AQW 5543/09)

Minister for Social Development: The waiting list for Cushendall shows that there are 58 people in need of housing, 33 of which are in housing stress.

The new Social Housing Development Programme for 2009/10 – 2013/14 is currently being considered and when approved will be published on the Housing Executive's website at www.nihe.gov.uk.

Housing Executive Homes in Enniskillen

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the waiting list for Housing Executive homes in Enniskillen. (AQW 5552/09)

Minister for Social Development: As at December 2008, there were 435 applicants on the waiting list in Enniskillen.

Savilles Estate Agents

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5283, what the relationship is between the steering group and Savilles estate agents. (AQW 5601/09)

Minister for Social Development: There is no relationship between the steering group and Savilles estate agents.

Savilles Estate Agents

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development what role Savilles estate agents played in the compilation of the Housing Executive's five year housing condition survey. (AQW 5603/09)

Minister for Social Development: Savilles estate agents played no role in the compilation of the Housing Executive's five year house Condition Survey.

Following a tender process, Savilles were however appointed to carry out the Stock Condition Survey on behalf of the Department for Social Development.

Carers Review

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4688/09, if she could be more specific than 'the review will be completed in the near future'. (AQW 5608/09)

Minister for Social Development: I have asked for a report on the joint review to be provided before Easter.

Housing Executive Tenants

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what maintenance schemes will go ahead in the North Down area for Housing Executive tenants, in the next financial year. (AQW 5615/09)

Minister for Social Development: Due to the review of the Housing Executive's programmes, caused by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget, this information is not yet available.

Warm Homes Scheme

Dr W McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development if the contract to deliver the Warm Homes Scheme has been put out to tender, and if so, when the process is likely to be completed. (AQW 5626/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which is a centre of excellence for procurement, has been handling the procurement for the new Warm Homes Scheme. The tender process is well under way. The evaluation of all applications received has been completed and applicants informed of the outcome. As tenders have not yet been invited I am unable to comment further but I expect the new scheme managers to be appointed in May 2009.

Jobs and Benefits Office

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development when Newcastle office is refurbished and reopened as a Jobs and Benefits Office, why there will not be room for the remaining Social Security Administration staff to return; and if the plans could be made available to the staff. (AQW 5631/09)

Minister for Social Development: While every effort has been made to maximise the capacity of the Valentia Place site, physical constraints and Planning Service restrictions mean that there is a limit to the number of staff the office will accommodate. Final decisions as to which staff will be deployed in the new Newcastle Jobs & Benefits office will be taken once the Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

Plans for the internal layout of the new office are at an early stage of development. Local staff and management will be consulted about the office layout when these plans have been refined.

Jobs and Benefits Office

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development to explain why Social Security Administration staff in Newcastle and the service they provide are under threat again. (AQW 5632/09)

Minister for Social Development: There is no threat to the Social Security service or to the employment of the staff currently located in Newcastle. The Agency remains committed to delivering a Jobs & Benefits service for Newcastle.

Jobs and Benefits Office

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development why Newcastle Social Security Office has been subjected to the Strategic Business Review before a decision has been made following the public consultation period. (AQW 5633/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Newcastle Social Security Office has not been subjected to any potential outworkings of the Strategic Business Review in advance of a decision on the way forward with this Review.

Social Fund Staff in Newcastle

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development if she has considered the implications for families of Social Fund staff in Newcastle who under the Strategic Business Review will have to move twice, first to Downpatrick then to Holywood Road; and what are the implications on the female work force who have caring responsibilities. (AQW 5634/09)

Minister for Social Development: The SBR proposals are currently the subject of public consultation and final decisions on the proposals, including the movement of staff, will not be made until consultation has been completed (late April 2009) and the responses have been fully considered.

Accommodation in Owner Occupied and Private Sectors

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether increasing numbers of people are presenting as homeless because of loss of accommodation in owner occupied and private sectors. (AQW 5648/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Following table shows the number of households presenting as homeless as a result of the loss of accommodation by mortgage default and loss of private rented accommodation in the six months from August 2008 to January 2009.

Month	Mortgage Default	Loss of private rented accommodation
August 2008	10	118
September 2008	25	137
October 2008	35	124
November 2008	26	120
December 2008	18	91
January 2009	28	119
Total:	142	709

In the past six months there has been no discernable increase in the number of households presenting as homeless as a result of the loss of private rented accommodation. With regard to households presenting as homeless, due to mortgage default, there has been an increase of approximately 40% on the same period last year.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development the number of vacant Housing Executive properties in the South Antrim constituency. (AQW 5664/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available by Parliamentary constituency. However, at 31 January 2009, 248 Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties were vacant in the Housing Executive's District Offices at Antrim and Newtownabbey 2.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development whether the number of vacant Housing Executive properties in South Antrim is in excess of requirements and what consideration she would give to releasing these properties to address the growing homelessness problem. (AQW 5666/09)

Minister for Social Development: Whilst there is a clearly assessed housing need for general needs applicants in South Antrim who have registered on the Common Waiting List, it does not necessarily follow that vacant Housing Executive properties can ameliorate this need.

At any given time there will be a number of vacant or void Housing Executive dwellings, mostly for operational reasons; dwellings being re-let, improved or earmarked for use as temporary accommodation while major improvements are carried out. These properties form part of the housing supply. The number of vacant dwelling being held for decanting to facilitate improvements is kept under review.

Increasing Usage of E-mail

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to reduce the amount of paper documentation and to increase the usage of e-mail. (AQW 5733/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Department is continuing to implement its 2006 Policy on Sustainable Operations on the Department for Social Development Office Estate in order to become more resource efficient and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill. One specific aspect of reducing waste is to reduce paper consumption. This involves an increasing usage of electronic means of communication via the Department for Social Development Intranet, e-mail facilities and the Northern Ireland Civil Service Electronic Records Management System introduced in 2008 which allows storage and viewing of electronic documents.

Housing Executive

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how much additional revenue the Housing Executive expects to raise in 2009/10 from approved rent increases for its tenants. (AQW 5755/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive expects to receive additional revenue of £4.54m in respect of the 2009/10 rent increase of 1.95%.

Departmental Functions: Transfer to Local Government

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Social Development to outline which functions will transfer from her Department to Local Government under the Review of Public Administration. (AQO 2212/09)

Minister for Social Development: I am very pleased to see the positive engagement that has developed between local government and Departments on the transfer of certain functions to the new local Councils in May 2011. As this House will know from my previous public statements on the Review of Public Administration, I fully support a vision of strong local government that has the needs of all citizens at its core and which is fully empowered through its responsibility for community planning.

My Department will be transferring substantial functions to the new local Councils including responsibility for the operational delivery of urban regeneration and support for the voluntary and community sector at local level. I will also be transferring housing functions relating to houses in multiple occupation, housing unfitness,

Traveller transit sites and local energy conservation. These functions rest naturally within local government and my officials and I will work enthusiastically in partnership with the structures the Minister for Local Government has established to achieve a smooth transition to delivery by the new local Councils.

Housing Agenda: EU Resources

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development if she has taken advantage of the resources of the European Union in advancing the new housing agenda. (AQO 2213/09)

Minister for Social Development: When I launched the New Housing Agenda last year, I made it clear that I would be looking for innovative solutions we all want to see delivered. The Agenda included an Empty Homes Strategy, making the best use of surplus government land, a new Procurement Strategy and changes to the House Sales Scheme to name but a few. That is why I am pleased to report to the House that as part of our Housing Programme, Clanmil Housing Association has recently secured £15million from the European Investment Bank to support the delivery of three new housing projects across Belfast – a first for Northern Ireland.

This funding will help finance inner city residential developments on the Ormeau Road, at Pilot Street and at Sunningdale Gardens. In total 238 new homes will be provided to help those in greatest housing need, a key objective of the New Housing Agenda.

Northern Ireland has already benefited in so many ways from European funding packages and I am delighted that housing can now be added to that list.

My Department has already met with the Housing Finance Corporation who made the necessary arrangements to deliver this funding and I hope we can attract further European investment for housing here in the future.

Social Housing: Private-Sector Finance

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to attract greater private sector finance into the social and affordable housing sector. (AQO 2214/09)

Minister for Social Development: When I launched the New Housing Agenda I made it clear that we would look to bring forward greater levels of Private Finance to complement the resources already committed from the Public Purse. Since then I have reduced our subsidy to Housing Associations by approximately 10%, in effect requiring Housing Associations to contribute even greater levels of Private Finance in the delivery of new social homes. We have already mentioned the European Investment Bank £15m for Clanmil Housing Association which will further support our work. Northern Ireland Co-ownership Housing Association has also for the first time been able to attract their own significant private investment to deliver affordable housing and I am very encouraged to see that the Ulster Bank has recently agreed to work with Co-ownership in making 100 % mortgages without deposits available to applicants.

In addition to this my officials continue to work closely with the Strategic Investment Board to identify new opportunities to complement the delivery of our Programme. I am determined to leave no stone unturned in my desire to provide more housing opportunities for those in greatest need.

Social Security Agency: Efficiency Savings

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development, if under proposed efficiency savings for the Social Security Agency which will result in the phasing out of up to 200 jobs by 2011, what assurance she can give to those wishing to remain in employment with the Social Security Agency that their jobs will not be under threat. (AQO 2215/09)

Minister for Social Development: I have said repeatedly that whatever changes are made to improve SSA services that no-one in the Agency will lose their employment. That remains the position. And no office will close. If the service improvement initiatives yield efficiencies in the medium term it will not threaten staff employment.

Travellers: Programmes/Schemes

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister for Social Development if the planning of any programmes or schemes in relation to Travellers' sites is determined by the geographical choice of Traveller families, a statutory requirement or a matter of policy. (AQO 2216/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is responsible for the provision of accommodation for Travellers. The planning of any programmes or schemes is based on the scale of need within the geographical areas of choice of Traveller families and is informed by a comprehensive strategic needs assessment of current and projected accommodation requirements of all Travellers. The latest Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment was launched in December 2008 and will be used to facilitate decision making in relation to future accommodation schemes for the Traveller Community.

Belfast: Arterial Route Scheme

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the arterial route scheme in Belfast. (AQO 2217/09)

Minister for Social Development: Sponsored by the Department for Social Development but delivered by Belfast City Council, the arterial routes scheme relates to environmental improvements along a number of key nodes within West Belfast and the Greater Shankill area, namely, Falls Road, Shankill Road, Springfield Road, Crumlin Road and Broadway. The programme of work complements regeneration initiatives already underway in these areas including Neighbourhood Renewal and the Renewing the Routes Programme.

A significant level of work has already taken place on the Shankill, Springfield, Crumlin and Falls Roads including commercial frontage improvements, floodlighting, public realm and environmental improvement. The future work programme includes further commercial, environmental and landscaping schemes along the targeted routes and the installation of a significant art piece for the Gaeltacht Quarter 'An Ceiliúradh/Celebration'. The scheme is due to complete in March 2010.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of eligibility for financial assistance for insulation under the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQO 2218/09)

Minister for Social Development: Householders with a child under the age of 16 who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit and householders over the age of 60 who are in receipt of a qualifying benefit are eligible for insulation measures under the current Warm Homes Scheme. The eligibility criteria for insulation measures under the new Warm Homes Scheme are being extended to include householders who are in receipt of Working Tax Credit. This will ensure that assistance is targeted at the most vulnerable people and those in greatest need of help to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

Housing Maintenance Programme

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development if Housing Maintenance Programmes will proceed, and if not, what plans she has to bring forward a detailed breakdown of where cuts will be made. (AQO 2219/09)

Minister for Social Development: It is too early in the review of the Housing Executive's programmes to state the specific locations that might be affected by the shortfall in the Housing Executive's budget. The Housing Executive has been working alongside my Department to minimise the impact of the shortfall and a proposal to reallocate £10.5 million from existing Departmental resources to the Housing Executive has been made. This is subject to Executive agreement which will be sought as part of February monitoring. The Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes within its programmes at the earliest opportunity and will ensure that all emergency and urgent tenant repairs will be completed.

Programme for Government

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the Executive's Programme for Government, in light of the current economic downturn. (AQO 2220/09)

Minister for Social Development: I can only speak for my own Department in assessing the impact of the economic downturn on the Programme for Government. In saying this however, I am sure my colleagues are experiencing similar problems as many of the assumptions that underpinned the Programme from the outset have been fundamentally changed. It is therefore imperative for commitments to be re-assessed to reflect a more realistic position.

Currently in my own Department's capital programme which impacts housing and urban regeneration targets, there is shortfall in the region of £180million over the next two years largely because of a reduction in receipts from house and land sales and the difficulties in levering in private finance and disposing of assets. While I am doing everything I can to ensure we meet our targets, including those for housing, the outlook is not particularly good.

The social and economic focus of my Department's portfolio means that the reported increases in unemployment will put pressure on frontline services at a time when people need us most for help and support.

The rise in the number of families suffering from fuel poverty as a result of significantly higher oil prices last year and the associated monetary assistance required from my Department has additionally put pressure on finite resources.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Social Development if all persons eligible for the £150 payment towards winter fuel costs, will receive the payment in this financial year. (AQO 2221/09)

Minister for Social Development: Following the designation of my Department on 17 February to develop a Fuel Payment Scheme, I presented proposals to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 23 February for their consideration. My proposals were subsequently considered by the Executive on 26 February, when they were approved.

Much work has already been undertaken to make payments as quickly as possible. However, given that some 150,000 households will benefit from this payment, which amounts to over £22.5million, it has been necessary to engage the assistance of the Department for Work and Pensions to make the payments through the UK-wide Benefit Systems. By using the Benefit Systems, payments will be made considerably quicker than by any other means and this will also ensure that payments are made accurately and securely. Work is continuing to finalise the system requirements to make the payment, which will be made in April.

Strategic Business Review: Job Losses

Mr F Brolly asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of staff working in Social Security Offices who will lose their jobs under the Strategic Business Review of the Social Security Agency. (AQO 2222/09)

Minister for Social Development: I would refer the member to my previous response to AQW 3082/09, and would re-emphasise, there is no risk of staff working in Social Security Offices losing their employment under the proposed Strategic Business Review of the Social Security Agency.

Economic Downturn

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister for Social Development what proposals she has brought forward to the Executive to help counter the effects of the economic downturn. (AQO 2223/09)

Minister for Social Development: On 27 November 2008 I submitted a paper to my Executive colleagues entitled 'Social Housing – An effective way to address the Downturn in the NI Economy.' In this paper I outlined how an increased investment in social housing could have a profoundly beneficial effect on the economy in a relatively short period of time.

In addition to the economic benefits of increased investment in social housing, delivery against important social policy objectives, particularly those identified in the Programme for Government, could be more quickly achieved with this investment.

My paper contained specific and costed proposals for increases in the Social Housing Development Programme, social housing maintenance and repairs and the Warm Homes Scheme. Unfortunately the Executive was not able to support my proposals at that time. However, I remain convinced that the current market conditions are more suited now than ever before to increase our investment in social housing to stimulate the economy, protect jobs and help those in housing stress. I will continue to lobby my Executive colleagues for their support of my proposals.

Mortgage Relief Scheme

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what benefits the Mortgage Relief Scheme provides for people who have difficulty in meeting their mortgage repayments and face the prospect of their homes being repossessed. (AQO 2224/09)

Minister for Social Development: The current increase in mortgage arrears and consequential increase in home repossessions here is a direct result of the worldwide credit crunch. As a result of my concerns last year, I announced my desire to introduce a Mortgage Rescue Scheme.

Consultation on the Mortgage Rescue Scheme concluded shortly before Christmas and officials are currently considering responses. It is anticipated however, that the Scheme will take two elements: prevention and intervention. The prevention element of the scheme would provide advice to people either facing or actually in arrears to explore the options available to them. The intervention element would potentially help people facing repossession to sell their home either in full or in part to a Housing Association and then rent it back. The introduction of the Scheme will be subject to securing funding and the appropriate approvals to spend that money.

Housing Benefit

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to make the existing housing budget stretch further. (AQO 2225/09)

Minister for Social Development: A Procurement Strategy has been drawn up and will become operative from April 2009. Collaborative procurement will provide the conditions for integrating resources, improving consistency and continuity and obtaining better value for money. One of the overall goals of the strategy is to procure the Social Housing Development Programme on a value for money basis and in accordance with best practice. One of the primary objectives of the strategy is to achieve a noticeable increase in efficiency with a minimum target of 10% cost efficiency over a five year period. This should enable more houses to be built for the same amount of funding

A key element of social housing provision is Total Cost Indicators (TCI). The Total Cost Indicators allowances have reduced significantly in the last (autumn 2008) review and will fall again in the coming spring 2009 review, thereby enabling more social housing units to be provided within the allocated budget.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Printed Paper Office

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission how much money has been spent by the Printed Paper Office on (i) printing; and (ii) all publications that have been sent to Assembly Members since devolution was restored. (AQW 5326/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): From 8 May 2007 until 31 January 2009 the total amount spent by the Printed Paper Office on printing was £381,085.40.

Out of the above figure, £258,340.55 related to print costs incurred on publications delivered to both Members and Secretariat staff.

Printed Paper Office

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission how many Assembly Members have chosen to receive reports by email rather than hard copy. (AQW 5327/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): Following a survey of Members' requirements carried out by the Printed Paper Office last summer, 22 Members have chosen to receive Committee Reports by email rather than hard copy.

Printed Paper Office

Mr D McKay asked the Assembly Commission to list all the work and initiatives it has undertaken to reduce the amount of paper that elected members receive. (AQW 5328/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Mr S Moutray): Following a survey of Members and a review of distribution lists last summer (2008), Hansard was able to reduce the numbers of hard copy reports sent to Members — 18 Members no longer receive hard copy Bound Volumes (a reduction of 17%) and 40 Members no longer receive hard copy daily reports (a reduction of 37%).

The Printed Paper Office also carried out a survey of Members' requirements, by issuing a 'Publication Request Form' last August (copy attached). The responses of which have led to an average total reduction in print of 35%.

The Printed Paper Office plans to review Members' requirements on an annual basis.

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